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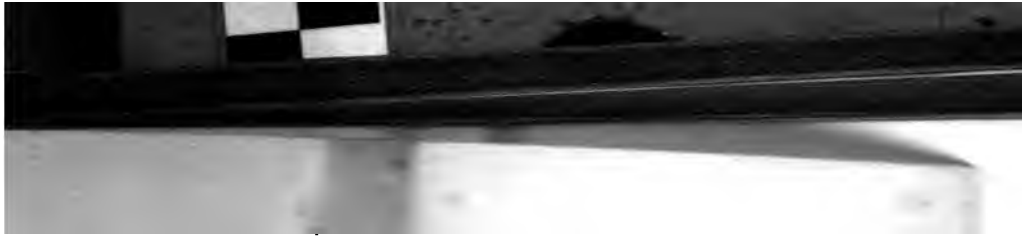


The last blithe shout hath died upon our ear,
And harvest home hath hush'd the clanging wain,
On the waste hill no forms of life appear,
Save where, sad laggard of the autumnal train,
Some age-struck wanderer gleans few ears of scatter'd grain.

Deem'st thou these sadden'd scenes have pleasure still,
Lov'st thou through Autumn's fading realms to stray,
To see the heath-flower wither'd on the hill,
To listen to the wood's expiring lay,
To note the red leaf shivering on the spray,
To mark the last bright tints the mountain stain,
On the waste fields to trace the gleaner's way,
And moralize on mortal joy and pain?—
O! if such scenes thou lov'st, scorn not the minstrel strain.

No! do not scorn, although its hoarser note
Scarce with the cushat's homely song can vie,
Though faint its beauties as the tints remote
That gleam through mist in Autumn's evening sky.
And few as leaves that tremble, sear and dry,
When wild November hath his bugle wound;
Nor mock my toil—a lonely gleaner I,
Through fields time-wasted, on sad inquest bound,
Where happier bards of yore have richer harvest found.

So shalt thou list, and haply not unmoved,
To a wild tale of Albyn's warrior day;







THE LORD OF THE ISLES.

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In vain the attendants' fond appeal
To Morag's skill, to Morag's zeal ;
She mark'd her child receive their care
Cold as the image sculptured fair,
(Form of some sainted patroness,)
Which cloister'd maids combine to dress ;
She mark'd—and knew her nursling's heart
In the vain pomp took little part.
Wistful awhile she gazed—then press'd
The maiden to her anxious breast
In finish'd loveliness—and led
To where a turret's airy head,
Slender and steep, and battled round,
O'erlook'd, dark Mull ! thy mighty Sound.
Where thwarting tides, with mingled roar,
Part thy swarth hills from Morven's shore.

VIII.

“ Daughter,” she said, “ these seas behold,
Round twice a hundred islands roll'd,
From Hirt, that hears their northern roar,
To the green Ilay's fertile shore ;
Or mainland turn, where many a tower
Owns thy bold brother's feudal power,
Each on its own dark cape reclined,
And listening to its own wild wind,
From where Mingarry, sternly placed,
O'erawes the woodland and the waste,

To where Dunstaffnage hears the raging
Of Connal with his rocks engaging.
Think'st thou, amidst this ample round,
A single brow but thine has frown'd,
To sadden this auspicious morn,
That bids the daughter of high Lorn
Impledge her spousal faith to wed
The heir of mighty Somerled?
Ronald, from many a hero sprung,
The fair, the valiant, and the young,
LORD OF THE ISLES, whose lofty name
A thousand bards have given to fame,
The mate of monarchs, and allied
On equal terms with England's pride.—
From chieftain's tower to bondsman's cot,
Who hears the tale and triumphs not?
The damsel dons her best attire,
The shepherd lights his beltane fire,
Joy, joy! each warder's horn hath sung,
Joy, joy! each matin bell hath rung;
The holy priest says grateful mass,
Loud shouts each hardy galla-glass,
No mountain den holds outcast boor,
Of heart so dull, of soul so poor,
But he hath flung his task aside,
And claim'd this morn for holy-tide;
Yet empress of this joyful day,
Edith is sad while all are gay."—

IX.

Proud Edith's soul came to her eye,
Resentment check'd the struggling sigh,
Her hurrying hand indignant dried
The burning tears of injured pride—
“Morag, forbear! or lend thy praise
To swell yon hireling harpers' lays;
Make to yon maids thy boast of power,
That they may waste a wondering hour,
Telling of banners proudly borne,
Of pealing bell and bugle-horn,
Or, theme more dear, of robes of price,
Crownlets and gauds of rare device.
But thou, experienced as thou art,
Think'st thou with these to cheat the heart,
That bound in strong affection's chain,
Looks for return, and looks in vain?
No! sum thine Edith's wretched lot
In these brief words—He loves her not!

X.

“Debate it not—too long I strove
To call his cold observance love,
All blinded by the league that styled
Edith of Lorn,—while yet a child
She tripp'd the heath by Morag's side,—
The brave Lord Ronald's destined bride.

Ere yet I saw him, while afar
His broadsword blazed in Scotland's war,
Train'd to believe our fates the same,
My bosom throb'd when Ronald's name
Came gracing fame's heroic tale,
Like perfume on the summer gale.
What pilgrim sought our halls, nor told
Of Ronald's deeds in battle bold ;
Who touch'd the harp to heroes' praise,
But his achievements swell'd the lays ?
Even Morag—not a tale of fame
Was hers, but closed with Ronald's name.
He came ! and all that had been told
Of his high worth, seem'd poor and cold,
Tame, lifeless, void of energy,
Unjust to Ronald and to me !

XI.

“ Since then, what thought had Edith's heart,
And gave not plighted love its part !—
And what requital ? cold delay—
Excuse that shunn'd the spousal day.—
It dawns, and Ronald is not here !—
Hunts he Bentalla's nimble deer,
Or loiters he in secret dell
To bid some lighter love farewell,
And swear, that though he may not scorn,
A daughter of the House of Lorn,

Yet, when these formal rites are o'er,
Again they meet, to part no more?"

XII.

—"Hush, daughter, hush; thy doubts remove,
More nobly think of Ronald's love.
Look, where beneath the castle gray
His fleet unmoor from Aros bay!
See'st not each galley's topmast bend,
As on the yards the sails ascend?
Hiding the dark-blue land they rise,
Like the white clouds on April skies;
The shouting vassals man the oars,
Behind them sink Mull's mountain shores,
Onward their merry course they keep,
Through whistling breeze and foaming deep.
And mark the headmost, seaward cast,
Stoop to the freshening gale her mast,
As if she veil'd its banner'd pride,
To greet afar her prince's bride!
Thy Ronald comes, and while in speed
His galley mates the flying steed,
He chides her sloth!"—Fair Edith sigh'd,
Blush'd, sadly smiled, and thus replied:—

XIII.

"Sweet thought but vain!—No, Morag! mark,
Type of his course, yon lonely bark,

That oft hath shifted helm and sail,
To win its way against the gale,
Since peep of morn, my vacant eyes
Have view'd by fits the course she tries;
Now though the darkening scud come on,
And dawn's fair promises be gone,
And though the weary crew may see
Our sheltering haven on their lee,
Still closer to the rising wind
They strive her shivering sail to bind,
Still nearer to the shelves' dread verge
At every tack her course they urge,
As if they feared Artornish more
Than adverse winds and breakers' roar."

XIV.

Sooth spoke the Maid.—Amid the tide
The skiff she mark'd lay tossing sore,
And shifted oft her stooping side,
In weary tack from shore to shore.
Yet on her destined course no more
She gain'd, of forward way,
Than what a minstrel may compare
To the poor meed which peasants share,
Who toil the livelong day;
And such the risk her pilot braves,
That oft, before she wore,

Her boltsprit kiss'd the broken waves,
Where in white foam the ocean raves
Upon the shelving shore.
Yet, to their destined purpose true,
Undaunted toil'd her hardy crew,
Nor look'd where shelter lay,
Nor for Artornish Castle drew,
Nor steer'd for Aros bay.

XV.

Thus while they strove with wind and seas,
Borne onward by the willing breeze,
Lord Ronald's fleet swept by,
Streamer'd with silk, and trick'd with gold,
Mann'd with the noble and the bold
Of Island chivalry.
Around their prows the ocean roars,
And chafes beneath their thousand oars,
Yet bears them on their way :
So chafes the war-horse in his might,
That fieldward bears some valiant knight,
Champs, till both bit and boss are white,
But, foaming, must obey.
On each gay deck they might behold
Lances of steel, and crests of gold,
And hauberks with their burnish'd fold,
That shimmer'd fair and free ;

And each proud galley, as she pass'd
To the wild cadence of the blast
 Gave wilder minstrelsy.
Full many a shrill triumphant note
Saline and Scallastle bade float
 Their misty shores around ;
And Morven's echoes answer'd well,
And Duart heard the distant swell
 Come down the darksome Sound.

XVI.

So bore they on with mirth and pride,
And if that labouring bark they spied,
 'Twas with such idle eye
As nobles cast on lowly boor,
When, toiling in his task obscure,
 They pass him careless by.
Let them sweep on with heedless eyes !
But, had they known what mighty prize
 In that frail vessel lay,
The famish'd wolf, that prowls the wold,
Had scatheless pass'd the unguarded fold,
Ere, drifting by these galleys bold,
 Unchallenged were her way !
And thou, Lord Ronald, sweep thou on,
With mirth, and pride, and minstrel tone !
But had'st thou known who sail'd so nigh,
Far other glance were in thine eye !

Far other flush were in thy brow,
That, shaded by the bonnet, now
Assumes but ill the blithesome cheer
Of bridegroom when the bride is near !

XVII.

Yes, sweep they on !—We will not leave,
For them that triumph, those who grieve.
 With that armada gay
Be laughter loud and jocund shout,
And bards to cheer the wassail rout,
 With tale, romance, and lay ;
And of wild mirth each clamorous art,
Which, if it cannot cheer the heart,
May stupify and stun its smart,
 For one loud busy day.
Yes, sweep they on !—But with that skiff
 Abides the minstrel tale,
Where there was dread of surge and cliff,
Labour that strained each sinew stiff,
 And one sad Maiden's wail.

XVIII.

All day with fruitless strife they toil'd,
With eve the ebbing currents boil'd
 More fierce from strait and lake ;
And midway through the channel met
Conflicting tides that foam and fret,

And high their mingled billows jet,
As spears, that, in the battle set,
 Spring upward as they break.
Then, too, the lights of eve were past,
And louder sung the western blast
 On rocks of Inninmore ;
Rent was the sail, and strain'd the mast,
And many a leak was gaping fast,
And the pale steersman stood aghast,
 And gave the conflict o'er.

XIX.

'Twas then that One, whose lofty look
Nor labour dull'd nor terror shook,
 Thus to the Leader spoke :—
“ Brother, how hop'st thou to abide
The fury of this wilder'd tide,
Or how avoid the rock's rude side,
 Until the day has broke ?
Didst thou not mark the vessel reel,
With quivering planks, and groaning keel,
 At the last billow's shock ?
Yet how of better counsel tell,
Though here thou see'st poor Isabel
 Half dead with want and fear ;
For look on sea, or look on land,
Or yon dark sky, on every hand
 Despair and death are near.

For her alone I grieve,—on me
Danger sits light, by land and sea
 I follow where thou wilt ;
Either to bide the tempest's lour,
Or wend to yon unfriendly tower,
Or rush amid their naval power,
With war-cry wake their wassail-hour,
 And die with hand on hilt."—

XX.

That elder Leader's calm reply
 In steady voice was given,
" In man's most dark extremity,
 Oft succour dawns from Heaven.
Edward, trim thou the shatter'd sail,
The helm be mine, and down the gale
 Let our free course be driven ;
So shall we 'scape the western bay,
The hostile fleet, the unequal fray,
So safely hold our vessel's way
 Beneath the Castle wall ;
For if a hope of safety rest,
'Tis on the sacred name of guest,
Who seeks for shelter, storm distress'd,
 Within a chieftain's hall.
If not—it best beseems our worth,
Our name, our right, our lofty birth,
 By noble hands to fall."

XXI.

The helm, to his strong arm consign'd,
Gave the reef'd sail to meet the wind,
And on her alter'd way,
Fierce bounding, forward sprung the ship,
Like greyhound starting from the slip
To seize his flying prey.
Awaked before the rushing prow,
The mimic fires of ocean glow,
Those lightnings of the wave ;
Wild sparkles crest the broken tides,
And, flashing round, the vessel's sides
With elvish lustre lave,
While, far behind, their livid light
To the dark billows of the night
A gloomy splendour gave.
It seems as if old Ocean shakes
From his dark brow the lucid flakes
In envious pageantry,
To match the meteor-light that streaks
Grim Hecla's midnight sky.

XXII.

Nor lack'd they steadier light to keep
Their course upon the darken'd deep ;—
Artornish, on her frowning steep
'Twixt cloud and ocean hung.

Glanced with a thousand lights of glee,
And landward far, and far to sea,
Her festal radiance flung.
By that blithe beacon-light they steer'd,
Whose lustre mingled well
With the pale beam that now appear'd,
As the cold moon her head uprear'd
Above the eastern fell.

XXIII.

Thus guided, on their course they bore,
Until they near'd the mainland shore,
When frequent on the hollow blast
Wild shouts of merriment were cast,
And wind and wave and sea-birds' cry
With wassail sounds in concert vie,
Like funeral shrieks with revelry,
Or like the battle-shout
By peasants heard from cliffs on high,
When Triumph, Rage, and Agony,
Madden the fight and rout.
Now nearer yet, through mist and storm
Dimly arose the Castle's form,
And deepen'd shadow made,
Far lengthen'd on the main below,
Where, dancing in reflected glow,
A hundred torches play'd,

Spangling the wave with lights as vain
As pleasures in this vale of pain,
That dazzle as they fade.

XXIV.

Beneath the Castle's sheltering lee,
They staid their course in quiet sea.
Hewn in the rock, a passage there
Sought the dark fortress by a stair,
So straight, so high, so steep,
With peasant's staff one valiant hand
Might well the dizzy pass have mann'd,
'Gainst hundreds arm'd with spear and brand,
And plunged them in the deep.
His bugle then the helmsman wound ;
Loud answer'd every echo round,
From turret, rock, and bay,
The postern's hinges crash and groan,
And soon the warder's cresset shone
On those rude steps of slippery stone,
To light the upward way.
" Thrice welcome, holy Sire ! " he said ;
" Full long the spousal train have staid,
And, vex'd at thy delay,
Fear'd lest, amidst these wildering seas,
The darksome night and freshening breeze
Had driven thy bark astray. " —

XXV.

“Warder,” the younger stranger said,
“Thine erring guess some mirth had made
In mirthful hour; but nights like these,
When the rough winds wake western seas,
Brook not of glee. We crave some aid
And needful shelter for this maid
Until the break of day;
For, to ourselves, the deck’s rude plank
Is easy as the mossy bank
That’s breathed upon by May.
And for our storm-toss’d skiff we seek
Short shelter in this leeward creek,
Prompt when the dawn the east shall streak
Again to bear away.”—
Answered the Warder, “In what name
Assert ye hospitable claim?
Whence come, or whither bound?
Hath Erin seen your parting sails?
Or come ye on Norweyan gales?
And seek ye England’s fertile vales,
Or Scotland’s mountain ground?”—

XXVI.

“Warriors—for other title none
For some brief space we list to own,
Bound by a vow—warriors are we;

In strife by land, and storm by sea,
 We have been known to fame ;
And these brief words have import dear
When sounded in a noble ear,
To harbour safe, and friendly cheer,
 That gives us rightful claim.
Grant us the trivial boon we seek,
And we in other realms will speak
 Fair of your courtesy ;
Deny—and be your niggard Hold
Scorn'd by the noble and the bold
Shunn'd by the pilgrim on the wold,
 And wanderer on the lea !"—

XXVII.

“ Bold stranger, no—'gainst claim like thine
No bolt revolves by hand of mine,
Though urged in tone that more express'd
A monarch than a suppliant guest.
Be what ye will, Artornish Hall
On this glad eve is free to all.
Though ye had drawn a hostile sword
'Gainst our ally, great England's Lord,
Or mail upon your shoulders borne,
To battle with the Lord of Lorn,
Or, outlaw'd, dwelt by greenwood tree
With the fierce Knight of Ellerslie,

Or aided even the murderous strife,
When Comyn fell beneath the knife
Of that fell homicide The Bruce,
This night had been a term of truce.—
Ho, vassals ! give these guests your care,
And show the narrow postern stair.”

XXVIII.

To land these two bold brethren leapt,
(The weary crew their vessel kept,)
And, lighted by the torches' flare,
That seaward flung their smoky glare,
The younger knight that maiden bare
Half lifeless up the rock ;
On his strong shoulder leaned her head,
And down her long dark tresses shed,
As the wild vine in tendrils spread,
Droops from the mountain oak.
Him follow'd close that elder Lord,
And in his hand a sheathed sword,
Such as few arms could wield ;
But when he boun'd him to such task,
Well could it cleave the strongest casque,
And rend the surest shield.

XXIX.

The raised portcullis' arch they pass,
The wicket with its bars of brass,

The entrance long and low,
Flank'd at each turn by loop-holes s'rait,
Where bowmen might in ambush wait,
(If force or fraud should burst the gate,)
To gall an entering foe.
But every jealous post of ward
Was now defenceless and unbarr'd,
And all the passage free
To one low-brow'd and vaulted room,
Where squire and yeoman, page and groom,
Plied their loud revelry.

XXX.

And "Rest ye here," the Warder bade,
"Till to our Lord your suit is said.—
And, comrades, gaze not on the Maid,
And on these men who ask our aid,
As if ye ne'er had seen
A damsel tired of midnight bark,
Or wanderers of a moulding stark,
And bearing martial mein."
But not for Eachin's reproof
Would page or vassal stand aloof
But crowded on to stare,
As men of courtesy untaught,
Till fiery Edward roughly caught,
From one the foremost there,

His chequer'd plaid, and in its shroud,
To hide her from the vulgar crowd,
Involved his sister fair.
His brother, as the clansman bent
His sullen brow in discontent,
Made brief and stern excuse ;—
“ Vassal, were thine the cloak of pall
That decks thy Lord in bridal hall,
'Twere honour'd by her use.”

XXXI.

Proud was his tone, but calm ; his eye
Had that compelling dignity,
His mien that bearing haught and high,
Which common spirits fear ;
Needed nor word nor signal more,
Nod, wink, and laughter, all were o'er ;
Upon each other back they bore,
And gazed like startled deer.
But now appear'd the Seneschal,
Commission'd by his lord to call
The strangers to the Baron's hall,
Where feasted fair and free
That Island Prince in nuptial tide,
With Edith there his lovely bride,
And her bold brother by her side,
And many a chief, the flower and pride
Of Western land and sea.

**Here pause we, gentles, for a space ;
And, if our tale hath won your grace,
Grant us brief patience, and again
We will renew the minstrel strain.**





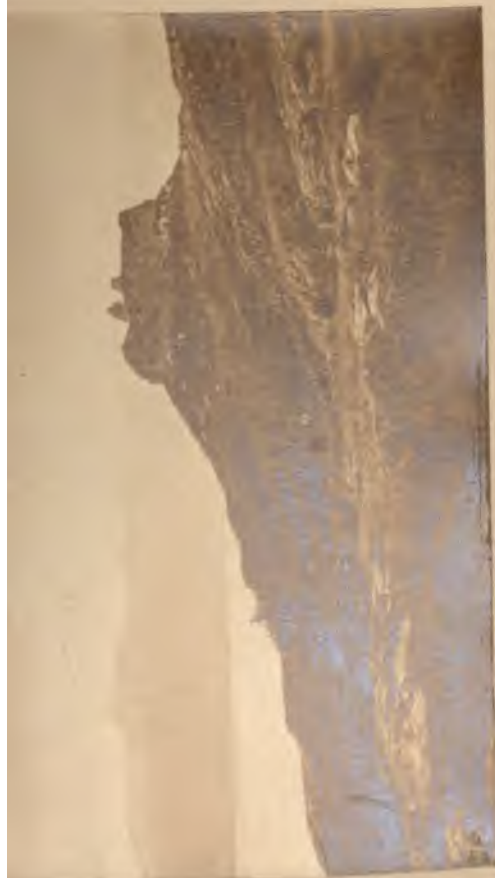
I.

FILL the bright goblet, spread the festive board !
Summon the gay, the noble, and the fair !
Through the loud hall in joyous concert pour'd,
Let mirth and music sound the dirge of Care !
But ask thou not if Happiness be there,
If the loud laugh disguise convulsive throe,
Or if the brow the heart's true livery wear ;
Lift not the festal mask !—enough to know,
No scene of mortal life but teems with mortal woe.





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ARTORNISH CASTLE.

"Slender and steep, and battled round,
Overlooked dark Mull! thy mighty Summ!"



II.

With beakers' clang, with harpers' lay,
With all that olden time deem'd gay,
The Island Chieftain feasted high ;
But there was in his troubled eye
A gloomy fire, and on his brow,
Now sudden flush'd, and faded now,
Emotions such as draw their birth
From deeper source than festal mirth.
By fits he paused, and harper's strain,
And jester's tale went round in vain,
Or fell but on his idle ear
Like distant sounds which dreamers hear.
Then would he rouse him, and employ
Each art to aid the clamorous joy.
 And call for pledge and lay,
And, for brief space, of all the crowd,
As he was loudest of the loud,
 Seem gayest of the gay.

III.

Yet nought amiss the bridal throng
Mark'd in brief mirth, or musing long ;
The vacant brow, the unlistening ear,
They gave to thoughts of raptures near,
And his fierce starts of sudden glee
Seem'd bursts of bridegroom's ecstasy.

Nor thus alone misjudged the crowd,
Since lofty Lorn, suspicious, proud,
And jealous of his honour'd line,
And that keen knight, De Argentine,
(From England sent on errand high,
The western league more firm to tie,)
Both deem'd in Ronald's mood to find
A lover's transport-troubled mind.
But one sad heart, one tearful eye,
Pierced deeper through the mystery,
And watch'd, with agony and fear,
Her wayward bridegroom's varied cheer.

IV.

She watch'd—yet fear'd to meet his glance,
And he shunn'd hers;—till when by chance
They met, the point of foeman's lance
Had given a milder pang!
Beneath the intolerable smart
He writhed;—then sternly mann'd his heart
To play his hard but destined part,
And from the table sprang.
“Fill me the mighty cup!” he said,
“Erst own'd by royal Somerled:
Fill it, till on the studded brim
In burning gold the bubbles swim,
And every gem of varied shine
Glow doubly bright in rosy wine!

To you, brave lord, and brother mine,
Of Lorn, this pledge I drink—
The union of Our House with thine,
By this fair bridal-link!"—

V.

"Let it pass round!" quoth he of Lorn,
"And in good time—that winded horn
Must of the Abbot tell;
The laggard monk is come at last."
Lord Ronald heard the bugle-blast,
And on the floor at random cast,
The untasted goblet fell.
But when the warder in his ear
Tells other news, his blither cheer
Returns like sun of May,
When through a thunder-cloud it beams!—
Lord of two hundred isles, he seems
As glad of brief delay,
As some poor criminal might feel,
When, from the gibbet or the wheel,
Respited for a day.

VI.

"Brother of Lorn," with hurried voice
He said, "And you, fair lords, rejoice!
Here, to augment our glee,
Come wandering knights from travel far,

Well proved, they say, in strife of war,
And tempest on the sea.—
Ho! give them at your board such place
As best their presences may grace,
And bid them welcome free!”
With solemn step, and silver wand,
The Seneschal the presence scann'd
Of these strange guests; and well he knew
How to assign their rank its due;
For though the costly furs
That erst had deck'd their caps were torn,
And their gay robes were over-worn,
And soil'd their gilded spurs,
Yet such a high commanding grace
Was in their mien and in their face,
As suited best the princely dais,
And royal canopy;
And there he marshall'd them their place,
First of that company.

VII.

Then lords and ladies spake aside,
And angry looks the error chide,
That gave to guests unnamed, unknown,
A place so near their prince's throne;
But Owen Erraught said,
“For forty years a seneschal,

To marshal guests in bower and hall
Has been my honour'd trade.
Worship and birth to me are known,
By look, by bearing, and by tone,
Not by furr'd robe or broider'd zone ;
And 'gainst an oaken bough
I'll gage my silver wand of state,
That these three strangers oft have sate
In higher place than now."—

VIII.

"I, too," the aged Ferrand said,
"Am qualified by minstrel trade
Of rank and place to tell ;—
Mark'd ye the younger stranger's eye,
My mates, how quick, how keen, how high,
How fierce its flashes fell,
Glancing among the noble rout
As if to seek the noblest out,
Because the owner might not brook
On any save his peers to look ?
And yet it moves me more,
That steady, calm, majestic brow,
With which the elder chief even now
Scann'd the gay presence o'er,
Like being of superior kind,
In whose high-toned impartial mind

Degrees of mortal rank and state
Seem objects of indifferent weight.
The lady too—though closely tied
The mantle veil both face and eye,
Her motions' grace it could not hide,
Nor could her form's fair symmetry."

IX.

Suspicious doubt and lordly scorn
Lour'd on the haughty front of Lorn.
From underneath his brows of pride,
The stranger guests he sternly eyed,
And whisper'd closely what the ear
Of Argentine alone might hear;
Then question'd, high and brief,
If, in their voyage, aught they knew
Of the rebellious Scottish crew,
Who to Rath-Erin's shelter drew,
With Carrick's outlaw'd Chief?
And if, their winter's exile o'er,
They harbour'd still by Ulster's shore,
Or launch'd their galleys on the main,
To vex their native land again?

X.

That younger stranger, fierce and high,
At once confronts the Chieftain's eye
With look of equal scorn ;—

"Of rebels have we nought to show ;
But if of Royal Bruce thou'dst know,
 I warn thee he has sworn,
Ere thrice three days shall come and go,
His banner Scottish winds shall blow,
Despite each mean or mighty foe,
From England's every bill and bow,
 To Allaster of Lorn."
Kindled the mountain Chieftain's ire,
But Ronald quench'd the rising fire :
"Brother, it better suits the time
To chase the night with Ferrand's rhyme,
Than wake, 'midst mirth and wine, the jars
That flow from these unhappy wars."—
"Content," said Lorn ; and spoke apart
With Ferrand, master of his art,
 Then whisper'd Argentine,—
"The lay I named will carry smart
To these bold strangers' haughty heart,
 If right this guess of mine."
He ceased, and it was silence all,
Until the Minstrel waked the hall.

XI.

The Brooch of Lorn.

"Whence the brooch of burning gold,
That clasps the Chieftain's mantle-fold,
Wrought and chased with rare device,
Studded fair with gems of price,

THE LORD OF THE ISLES.

On the varied tartans beaming,
As, through night's pale rainbow gleaming,
Fainter now, now seen afar,
Fitful shines the northern star !

" Gem ! ne'er wrought on Highland mountain,
Did the fairy of the fountain,
Or the mermaid of the wave,
Frame thee in some coral cave ?
Did, in Iceland's darksome mine,
Dwart's swart hands thy metal twine ?
Or, mortal-moulded comest thou here,
From England's love, or France's fear ?

XII.

Song continued.

" No !—thy splendours nothing tell
Foreign art or fairy spell,
Moulded thou for monarch's use,
By the overweening Bruce,
When the royal robe he tied
O'er a heart of wrath and pride :
Thence in triumph wert thou torn,
By the victor hand of Lorn !

" When the gem was won and lost,
Widely was the war-cry toss'd !
Rung aloud Bendourish fell,
Answer'd Douchart's sounding dell,
Fled the deer from wild Teyndrum,
When the homicide, o'ercome,
Hardly 'scaped, with scathe and scorn,
Left the pledge with conquering Lorn !

XIII.

Song concluded.

" Vain was then the Douglas brand,
Vain the Campbell's vaunted hand,
Vain Kirkpatrick's bloody dirk,
Making sure of murder's work ;
Barendown fled fast away,
Fled the fiery De la Haye,
When this brooch, triumphant borne,
Beam'd upon the breast of Lorn.

" Farthest fled its former Lord,
Left his men to brand and cord,
Bloody brand of Highland steel,
English gibbet, axe, and wheel.
Let him fly from coast to coast,
Dogg'd by Comyn's vengeful ghost,
While his spoils, in triumph worn,
Long shall grace victorious Lorn ! "

XIV.

As glares the tiger on his foes,
Hemm'd in by hunters, spears, and bows,
And, ere he bounds upon the ring,
Selects the object of his spring,—
Now on the Bard, now on his Lord,
So Edward glared and grasp'd his sword,—
But stern his brother spoke,—" Be still.
What ! art thou yet so wild of will,
After high deeds and sufferings long,
To chafe thee for a menial's song ?
Well hast thou framed, Old Man, thy strains,
To praise the hand that pays thy pains !
Yet something might thy song have told
Of Lorn's three vassals, true and bold,
Who rent their Lord from Bruce's hold,
As underneath his knee he lay,
And died to save him in the fray.
I've heard the Bruce's cloak and clasp
Was clench'd within their dying grasp,
What time a hundred foemen more
Rush'd in and back the victor bore,

Long after Lorn had left the strife,
Full glad to 'scape with limb and life.—
Enough of this—And, Minstrel, hold,
As minstrel-hire, this chain of gold,
For future lays a fair excuse,
To speak more nobly of the Bruce.”

XV.

“ Now, by Columbia's shrine, I swear,
And every saint that's buried there,
'Tis he himself !” Lorn sternly cries,
“ And for my kinsman's death he dies.”
As loudly Ronald calls —“ Forbear !
Not in my sight while brand I wear,
O'ermatch'd by odds, shall warrior fall,
Or blood of stranger stain my hall !
This ancient fortress of my race
Shall be misfortune's resting-place,
Shelter and shield of the distress'd,
No slaughter-house for shipwreck'd guest.”—
“ Talk not to me,” fierce Lorn replied,
“ Of odds or match !—when Comyn died,
Three daggers clash'd within his side !
Talk not to me of sheltering hall,
The Church of God saw Comyn fall !
On God's own altar stream'd his blood,
While o'er my prostrate kinsman stood

The ruthless murderer—e'en as now—
With armed hand and scornful brow !—
Up, all who love me ! blow on blow !
And lay the outlaw'd felons low !”

XVI.

Then up sprung many a mainland Lord,
Obedient to their Chieftain's word.
Barcaldine's arm is high in air,
And Kinloch-Alline's blade is bare,
Black Murthok's dirk has left its sheath,
And clench'd is Dermid's hand of death.
Their mutter'd threats of vengeance swell
Into a wild and warlike yell ;
Onward they press with weapons high,
The affrighted females shriek and fly,
And, Scotland, then thy brightest ray
Had darken'd ere its noon of day,
But every chief of birth and fame,
That from the Isles of Ocean came,
At Ronald's side that hour withstood
Fierce Lorn's relentless thirst for blood.

XVII.

Brave Torquil from Dunvegan high,
Lord of the misty hills of Skye,
Mac-Niel, wild Bara's ancient thane,
Duart, of bold Clan Gillian's strain,

Fergus, of Canna's castled bay,
Mac-Duffith, Lord of Colonsay,
Soon as they saw the broadswords glance,
With ready weapons rose at once,
More prompt, that many an ancient feud,
Full oft suppress'd, full oft renew'd,
Glow'd 'twixt the chieftains of Argyle,
And many a lord of ocean's isle.
Wild was the scene—each sword was bare,
Back stream'd each chieftain's shaggy hair,
In gloomy opposition set,
Eyes, hands, and brandish'd weapons met ;
Blue gleaming o'er the social board,
Flash'd to the torches many a sword ;
And soon those bridal lights may shine
On purple blood for rosy wine.

XVIII.

While thus for blows and death prepared,
Each heart was up, each weapon bared,
Each foot advanced,—a surly pause
Still revered hospitable laws.
All menaced violence, but alike
Reluctant each the first to strike,
(For aye accursed in minstrel line
Is he who brawls 'mid song and wine,)
And, match'd in numbers and in might,
Doubtful and desperate seem'd the fight.

Thus threat and murmur died away,
Till on the crowded hall there lay
Such silence, as the deadly still,
Ere bursts the thunder on the hill,
With blade advanced, each Chieftain bold
Show'd like the Swarder's form of old,
As wanting still the torch of life,
To wake the marble into strife.

XIX.

That awful pause the stranger maid
And Edith, seized to pray for aid.
As to De Argentine she clung,
Away her veil the stranger flung,
And, lovely 'mid her wild despair,
Fast stream'd her eyes, wide flow'd her hair.
" O thou, of knighthood once the flower,
Sure refuge in distressful hour,
Thou, who in Judah well hast fought
For our dear faith, and oft hast sought
Renown in knightly exercise,
When this poor hand has dealt the prize,
Say, can thy soul of honour brook
On the unequal strife to look,
When, butcher'd thus in peaceful hall,
Those once thy friends, my brethren, fall ! "
To Argentine she turn'd her word,
But her eye sought the Island Lord.

A flush like evening's setting flame
Glow'd on his cheek ; his hardy frame,
As with a brief convulsion, shook :
With hurried voice and eager look,—
“ Fear not,” he said, “ my Isabel !
What said I—Edith !—all is well—
Nay, fear not—I will well provide
The safety of my lovely bride—
My bride ? ”—but there the accents clung
In tremor to his faltering tongue.

XX.

Now rose De Argentine, to claim
The prisoners in his sovereign's name,
To England's crown, who, vassals sworn,
'Gainst their liege lord had weapon borne—
(Such speech, I ween, was but to hide
His care their safety to provide ;
For knight more true in thought and deed
Than Argentine ne'er spurr'd a steed)—
And Ronald, who his meaning guess'd,
Seem'd half to sanction the request.
This purpose fiery Torquil broke :—
“ Somewhat we've heard of England's yoke,”
He said, “ and, in our islands, Fame
Hath whisper'd of a lawful claim,
That calls the Bruce fair Scotland's Lord,
Though dispossess'd by foreign sword.

This craves reflection—but though right
And just the charge of England's Knight,
Let England's crown her rebels seize
Where she has power ;—in towers like these,
'Midst Scottish Chieftains summon'd here
To bridal mirth and bridal cheer,
Be sure, with no consent of mine,
Shall either Lorn or Argentine
With chains of violence, in our sight,
Oppress a brave and banish'd Knight."

XXI.

Then waked the wild debate again,
With brawling threat and clamour vain.
Vassals and menials, thronging in,
Lent their brute rage to swell the din ;
When, far and wide, a bugle-clang
From the dark ocean upward rang.
"The Abbot comes !" they cry at once,
"The holy man, whose favour'd glance
Hath sainted visions known ;
Angels have met him on the way,
Beside the blessed martyrs' bay,
And by Columba's stone.
His monks have heard their hymnings high
Sound from the summit of Dun-Y.
To cheer his penance lone,
When at each cross, on girth and wold,

(Their number thrice a hundred-fold,
His prayer he made, his beads he told,
 With Aves many a one—
He comes our feuds to reconcile,
A sainted man from sainted isle ;
We will his holy doom abide,
The Abbot shall our strife decide.”

XXII.

Scarcely this fair accord was o’er,
When through the wide revolving door
 The black-stoled brethren wind ;
Twelve sandall’d monks, who relics bore,
With many a torch-bearer before,
 And many a cross behind.
Then sank each fierce uplifted hand,
And dagger bright and flashing brand
 Dropp’d swiftly at the sight ;
They vanish’d from the Churchman’s eye,
As shooting stars, that glance and die,
 Dart from the vault of night.

XXIII.

The Abbot on the threshold stood,
And in his hand the holy rood ;
Back on his shoulders flow’d his hood,
 The torch’s glaring ray

Show'd, in its red and flashing light,
His wither'd cheek and amice white,
His blue eye glistening cold and bright,
His tresses scant and grey.
"Fair Lords," he said, "Our Lady's love
And peace be with you from above,
And Benedicite !—
—But what means this ? no peace is here !
Do dirks unsheathed suit bridal cheer ?
Or are these naked brands
A seemly show for Churchman's sight,
When he comes summon'd to unite
Betrothed hearts and hands ?"

XXIV.

Then, cloaking hate with fiery zeal,
Proud Lorn first answer'd the appeal ;—
"Thou comest, O holy Man,
True sons of blessed church to greet,
But little deeming here to meet
A wretch, beneath the ban
Of Pope and Church, for murder done
E'en on the sacred altar-stone !—
Well mayst thou wonder we should know
Such miscreant here, nor lay him low,
Or dream of greeting, peace, or truce,
With excommunicated Bruce ?

Yet well I grant, to end debate,
Thy sainted voice decide his fate.

XXV.

Then Ronald pled the stranger's cause,
And knighthood's oath and honour's laws;
And Isabel, on bended knee,
Brought pray'rs and tears to back the plea.
And Edith lent her generous aid,
And wept, and Lorn for mercy pray'd.
"Hence," he exclaim'd, "degenerate maid!
Was't not enough to Ronald's bower
I brought thee, like a paramour,
Or bond-maid at her master's gate,
His careless cold approach to wait?—
But the bold lord of Cumberland,
The gallant Clifford, seeks thy hand;
His it shall be—Nay, no reply!
Hence! till those rebel eyes be dry."
With grief the Abbot heard and saw,
Yet nought relax'd his brow of awe.

XXVI.

Then Argentine, in England's name,
So highly urged his sovereign's claim,
He waked a spark, that, long suppress'd,
Had smoulder'd in Lord Ronald's breast;

And now, as from the flint the fire,
Flash'd forth at once his generous ire.
"Enough of noble blood," he said,
"By English Edward had been shed,
Since matchless Wallace first had been
In mock'ry crown'd with wreaths of green,
And done to death by felon hand,
For guarding well his father's land.
Where's Nigel Bruce? and De la Haye,
And valiant Seton—where are they?
Where Somerville, the kind and free?
And Fraser, flower of chivalry?
Have they not been on gibbet bound,
Their quarters flung to hawk and hound,
And hold we here a cold debate,
To yield more victims to their fate?
What! can the English Leopard's mood
Never be gorged with northern blood?
Was not the life of Athole shed,
To soothe the tyrant's sicken'd bed?
And must his word, till dying day,
Be nought but quarter, hang, and slay!—
Thou frown'st, De Argentine,—My gage
Is prompt to prove the strife I wage."—

XXVII.

"Nor deem," said stout Dunvegan's knight,
"That thou shalt brave alone the fight!"



By saints of isle and mainland both,
By Woden wild, (my grandsire's oath,)
Let Rome and England do their worst,
Howe'er attainted or accursed,
If Bruce shall e'er find friends again,
Once more to brave a battle-plain,
If Douglas couch again his lance,
Or Randolph dare another chance,
Old Torquil will not be to lack
With twice a thousand at his back.—
Nay, chafe not at my bearing bold,
Good Abbot ! for thou know'st of old,
Torquil's rude thought and stubborn will
Smack of the wild Norwegian still ;
Nor will I barter Freedom's cause
For England's wealth, or Rome's applause."

XXVIII.

The Abbot seem'd with eye severe
The hardy Chieftain's speech to hear ;
Then on King Robert turned the monk,
But twice his courage came and sunk,
Confronted with the hero's look ;
Twice fell his eye, his accents shook ;
At length, resolved in tone and brow,
Sternly he question'd him—"And thou,
Unhappy ! what hast thou to plead,
Why I denounce not on thy deed



CANTO SECOND.

49

That awful doom which canons tell
Shuts paradise, and opens hell ?
Anathema of power so dread,
It blends the living with the dead,
Bids each good angel soar away,
And every ill one claim his prey ;
Expels thee from the Church's care,
And deafens Heaven against thy prayer ;
Arms every hand against thy life,
Bans all who aid thee in the strife,
Nay, each whose succour, cold and scant,
With meanest alms relieves thy want ;
Haunts thee while living,—and, when dead,
Dwells on thy yet devoted head,
Rends Honour's scutcheon from thy hearse,
Stills o'er thy bier the holy verse,
And spurns thy corpse from hallow'd ground,
Flung like vile carrion to the hound ;
Such is the dire and desperate doom
For sacrilege, decreed by Rome ;
And such the well-deserved meed
Of thine unhallow'd, ruthless deed."—

XXIX.

" Abbot !" The Bruce replied, " thy charge
It boots not to dispute at large.
This much, howe'er, I bid thee know,
No selfish vengeance dealt the blow,

For Comyn died his country's foe.
Nor blame I friends whose ill-timed speed
Fulfill'd my soon-repent'd need,
Nor censure those from whose stern tongue
The dire anathema has rung.
I only blame mine own wild ire,
By Scotland's wrongs incensed to fire.
Heaven knows my purpose to atone,
Far as I may, the evil done,
And hears a penitent's appeal
From papal curse and prelate's zeal.
My first and dearest task achieved,
Fair Scotland from her thrall relieved,
Shall many a priest in cope and stole
Say requiem for Red Comyn's soul,
While I the blessed cross advance,
And expiate this unhappy chance
In Palestine, with sword and lance.
But, while content the Church should know
My conscience owns the debt I owe,
Unto De Argentine and Lorn
The name of traitor I return,
Bid them defiance stern and high,
And give them in their throats the lie!
These brief words spoke, I speak no more,
Do what thou wilt ; my shrift is o'er."

XXX.

Like man by prodigy amazed,
Upon the King the Abbot gazed ;
Then o'er his pallid features glance
Convulsions of ecstatic trance.
His breathing came more thick and fast,
And from his pale blue eyes were cast
Strange rays of wild and wandering light ;
Uprise his locks of silver white,
Flush'd is his brow, through every vein
In azure tide the currents strain,
And undistinguish'd accents broke
The awful silence ere he spoke.

XXXI.

“ De Bruce ! I rose with purpose dread
To speak my curse upon thy head,
And give thee as an outcast o'er
To him who burns to shed thy gore ;—
But, like the Midianite of old,
Who stood on Zophim, heaven-controll'd,
I feel within mine aged breast
A power that will not be repress'd.
It prompts my voice, it swells my veins,
It burns, it maddens, it constrains !—
De Bruce, thy sacrilegious blow
Hath at God's altar slain thy foe ;

O'ermaster'd yet by high behest,
I bless thee, and thou shalt be bless'd !"
He spoke, and o'er the astonish'd throng
Was silence, awful, deep, and long.

XXXII.

Again that light has fired his eye,
Again his form swells bold and high,
The broken voice of age is gone,
'Tis vigorous manhood's lofty tone :—
" Thrice vanquish'd on the battle-plain,
Thy followers slaughter'd, fled, or ta'en,
A hunted wanderer on the wild,
On foreign shores a man exiled,
Disown'd, deserted, and distress'd,
I bless thee, and thou shalt be bless'd !
Bless'd in the hall and in the field,
Under the mantle as the shield.
Avenger of thy country's shame,
Restorer of her injured fame,
Bless'd in thy sceptre and thy sword,
De Bruce, fair Scotland's rightful Lord,
Bless'd in thy deeds and in thy fame,
What lengthen'd honours wait thy name !
In distant ages, sire to son
Shall tell thy tale of freedom won,
And teach his infants, in the use
Of earliest speech, to falter Bruce.

Go, then, triumphant ! sweep along
Thy course, the theme of many a song !
The Power, whose dictates swell my breast,
Hath bless'd thee, and thou shalt be bless'd !—
Enough—my short-lived strength decays,
And sinks the momentary blaze.—
Heaven hath our destined purpose broke,
Not here must nuptial vow be spoke ;
Brethren, our errand here is o'er,
Our task discharged.—Unmoor, unmoor !”—
His priests received the exhausted Monk,
As breathless in their arms he sunk.
Punctual his orders to obey,
The train refused all longer stay,
Embark'd, raised sail, and bore away.





I.

HAST thou not mark'd, when o'er thy startled head
Sudden and deep the thunder-peal has roll'd,
How, when its echoes fell, a silence dead
Sunk on the wood, the meadow, and the wold?
The rye-grass shakes not on the sod-built fold,
The rustling aspen's leaves are mute and still,
The wall-flower waves not on the ruin'd hold,
Till, murmuring distant first, then near and shrill,
The savage whirlwind wakes, and sweeps the groaning hill.

II.

Artornish! such a silence sunk
Upon thy halls, when that grey monk
His prophet-speech had spoke;

And his obedient brethren's sail
Was stretch'd to meet the southern gale
Before a whisper woke.
Then murmuring sounds of doubt and fear,
Close pour'd in many an anxious ear,
The solemn stillness broke ;
And still they gazed with eager guess,
Where, in an oriel's deep recess,
The Island Prince seem'd bent to press
What Lorn, by his impatient cheer,
And gesture fierce, scarce deign'd to hear.

III.

Starting at length, with frowning look,
His hand he clench'd, his head he shook,
And sternly flung apart ;—
“ And deem'st thou me so mean of mood,
As to forget the mortal feud,
And clasp the hand with blood imbrued
From my dear Kinsman's heart ?
Is this thy rede ?—a due return
For ancient league and friendship sworn !
But well our mountain proverb shows
The faith of Islesmen ebbs and flows.
Be it even so—believe, ere long,
He that now bears shall wreak the wrong.—
Call Edith—call the Maid of Lorn !
My sister, slaves !—for further scorn,

Be sure nor she nor I will stay."—
Away, De Argentine, away!—
We nor ally nor brother know,
In Bruce's friend, or England's foe."

IV.

But who the Chieftain's rage can tell,
When, sought from lowest dungeon cell
To highest tower the castle round,
No Lady Edith was there found!
He shouted, "Falsehood!—treachery!—
Revenge and blood!—a lordly meed
To him that will avenge the deed!
A Baron's lands!"—His frantic mood
Was scarcely by the news withstood,
That Morag shared his sister's flight,
And that, in hurry of the night,
'Scaped noteless, and without remark,
Two strangers sought the Abbot's bark.—
"Man every galley!—fly—pursue!
The priest his treachery shall rue!
Ay, and the time shall quickly come,
When we shall hear the thanks that Rome
Will pay his feigned prophecy!"
Such was fierce Lorn's indignant cry;
And Cormac Doil in haste obey'd,
Hoisted his sail, his anchor weigh'd,

(For, glad of each pretext for spoil,
A pirate sworn was Cormac Doil.)
But others, lingering, spoke apart,—
“The Maid has given her maiden heart
 To Ronald of the Isles,
And, fearful lest her brother’s word
Bestow her on that English Lord,
 She seeks Iona’s piles,
And wisely deems it best to dwell
A votaress in the holy cell,
Until these feuds so fierce and fell
 The Abbot reconciles.”

V.

As, impotent of ire, the hall
Echo’d to Lorn’s impatient call,
“My horse, my mantle, and my train!
Let none who honour Lorn remain!”
Courteous, but stern, a bold request
To Bruce De Argentine express’d.
“Lord Earl,” he said,—“I cannot chuse
But yield such title to The Bruce,
Though name and Earldom both are gone,
Since he braced rebel’s armour on—
But, Earl or Serf—rude phrase was thine
Of late, and launch’d at Argentine;
Such as compels me to demand
Redress of honour at thy hand.

We need not to each other tell,
That both can wield their weapons well ;
Then do me but the soldier grace,
This glove upon thy helm to place
Where we may meet in fight ;
And I will say, as still I've said,
Though by ambition far misled,
Thou art a noble knight."—

VI.

"And I," the princely Bruce replied,
"Might term it stain on knighthood's pride,
That the bright sword of Argentine
Should in a tyrant's quarrel shine ;
But, for your brave request,
Be sure the honour'd pledge you gave
In every battle-field shall wave
Upon my helmet-crest ;
Believe, that if my hasty tongue
Hath done thine honour causeless wrong,
It shall be well redress'd.
Not dearer to my soul was glove,
Bestow'd in youth by lady's love,
Than this which thou hast given !
Thus, then, my noble foe I greet ;
Health and high fortune till we meet,
And then—what pleases Heaven !

VII.

Thus parted they—for now, with sound
Like waves roll'd back from rocky ground,
The friends of Lorn retire ;
Each mainland chieftain, with his train,
Draws to his mountain towers again,
Pondering how mortal schemes prove vain,
And mortal hopes expire.
But through the castle double guard,
By Ronald's charge, kept wakeful ward,
Wicket and gate were trebly barr'd,
By beam and bolt and chain ;
Then of the guests, in courteous sort,
He pray'd excuse for mirth broke short,
And bade them in Artornish fort
In confidence remain.
Now torch and menial tendance :
Chieftain and knight to bower and bed,
And beads were told, and Aves said,
And soon they sunk away
Into such sleep, as wont to shed
Oblivion on the weary head,
After a toilsome day.

VIII.

But soon uproused, the Monarch cried
To Edward slumbering by his side,

“Awake, or sleep for aye!
Even now there jarr’d a secret door—
A taper-light gleams on the floor—
Up, Edward, up, I say!
Some one glides in like midnight ghost—
Nay, strike not! ’tis our noble Host.”
Advancing then his taper’s flame,
Ronald stept forth, and with him came
Dunvegan’s chief—each bent the knee
To Bruce in sign of fealty,
And proffered him his sword,
And hail’d him, in a monarch’s style,
As king of mainland and of isle,
And Scotland’s rightful lord.
“And O,” said Ronald, “Own’d of Heaven!
Say, is my erring youth forgiven,
By falsehood’s arts from duty driven,
Who rebel falchion drew,
Yet ever to thy deeds of fame,
Even while I strove against thy claim,
Paid homage just and true?”—
“Alas! dear youth, the unhappy time,”
Answer’d The Bruce, “must bear the crime
Since, guiltier far than you,
Even I”—he paused; for Falkirk’s woes
Upon his conscious soul arose.
The Chieftain to his breast he press’d,
And in a sigh conceal’d the rest.

IX.

They proffer'd aid, by arms and might,
To repossess him in his right ;
But well their counsels must be weigh'd,
Ere banners raised and musters made,
For English hire and Lorn's intrigues
Bound many chiefs in southern leagues.
In answer, Bruce his purpose bold
To his new vassals frankly told.
" The winter worn in exile o'er,
I long'd for Carrick's kindred shore.
I thought upon my native Ayr,
And long'd to see the burly fare
That Clifford makes, whose lordly call
Now echoes through my father's hall.
But first my course to Arran led,
Where valiant Lennox gathers head,
And on the sea, by tempest toss'd,
Our barks dispersed, our purpose cross'd,
Mine own, a hostile sail to shun,
Far from her destined course had run,
When that wise will, which masters ours,
Compell'd us to your friendly towers."

X.

Then Torquil spoke : " The time craves speed !
We must not linger in our deed,

But instant pray our Sovereign Liege,
To shun the perils of a siege.
The vengeful Lorn, with all his powers,
Lies but too near Artornish towers.
And England's light-arm'd vessels ride,
Not distant far, the waves of Clyde,
Prompt at these tidings to unmoor,
And sweep each strait, and guard each shore.
Then, till this fresh alarm pass by,
Secret and safe my Liege must lie
In the far bounds of friendly Skye,
Torquil thy pilot and thy guide."—
"Not so, brave Chieftain," Ronald cried ;
"Myself will on my Sovereign wait,
And raise in arms the men of Sleate,
Whilst thou, renown'd where chiefs debate,
Shalt sway their souls by council sage,
And awe them by thy locks of age."—
"And if my words in weight shall fail,
This ponderous sword shall turn the scale."—

XI.

"The scheme," said Bruce, "contents me well,
Meantime, 'twere best that Isabel,
For safety, with my bark and crew,
Again to friendly Erin drew.
There Edward, too, shall with her wend,

In need to cheer her and defend,
And muster up each scatter'd friend."—
Here seem'd it as Lord Ronald's ear
Would other counsel gladlier hear ;
But, all achieved as soon as plann'd,
Both barks, in secret arm'd and mann'd,
 From out the haven bore ;
On different voyage forth they ply,
This for the coast of winged Skye,
 And that for Erin's shore.

XII.

With Bruce and Ronald bides the tale.
To favouring winds they gave the sail,
Till Mull's dark headlands scarce they knew,
And Ardnamurchan's hills were blue.
But then the squalls blew close and hard,
And, fain to strike the galley's yard,
 And take them to the oar,
With these rude seas, in weary plight,
They strove the livelong day and night,
Nor till the dawning had a sight
 Of Skye's romantic shore.
Where Coolin stoops him to the west,
They saw upon his shiver'd crest
 The sun's arising gleam ;
But such the labour and delay,

Ere they were moor'd in Scavigh bay,
(For calmer heaven compell'd to stay,)

He shot a western beam.

Then Ronald said, "If true mine eye,
These are the savage wilds that lie
North of Strathnardill and Dunskey ;

No human foot comes here,
And, since these adverse breezes blow, .
If my good Liege love hunter's bow,
What hinders that on land we go,

And strike a mountain-deer ?

Allan, my page, shall with us wend :

A bow full deftly can he bend,

And, if we meet a herd, may send

A shaft shall mend our cheer."

Then each took bow and bolts in hand,
Their row-boat launch'd and leapt to land,

And left their skiff and train,
Where a wild stream, with headlong shock,
Came brawling down its bed of rock,
To mingle with the main.

XIII.

A while their route they silent made,
As men who stalk for mountain-deer,
Till the good Bruce to Ronald said,
" St. Mary ! what a scene is here !

I've traversed many a mountain-strand,
Abroad and in my native land,
And it has been my lot to tread
Where safety more than pleasure led ;
Thus, many a waste I've wander'd o'er,
Clombe many a crag, cross'd many a moor,
But, by my halidome,
A scene so rude, so wild as this,
Yet so sublime in barrenness,
Ne'er did my wandering footsteps press,
Where'er I happ'd to roam."

XIV.

No marvel thus the Monarch spake ;
For rarely human eye has known
A scene so stern as that dread lake,
With its dark ledge of barren stone.
Seems that primeval earthquake's sway
Hath rent a strange and shatter'd way
Through the rude bosom of the hill,
And that each naked precipice,
Sable ravine, and dark abyss,
Tells of the outrage still.
The wildest glen, but this, can show
Some touch of Nature's genial glow ;
On high Benmore green mosses grow,
And heath-bells bud in deep Glencroe,
And copse on Cruchan-Ben ;

But here,—above, around, below,
On mountain or in glen,
Nor tree, nor shrub, nor plant, nor flower,
Nor aught of vegetative power,
The weary eye may ken.
For all is rocks at random thrown,
Black waves, bare crags, and banks of stone,
As if were here denied
The summer sun, the spring's sweet dew,
That clothe with many a varied hue
The bleakest mountain-side.

XV.

And wilder, forward as they wound,
Were the proud cliffs and lake profound.
Huge terraces of granite black
Afforded rude and cumber'd track ;
For from the mountain hoar,
Hurl'd headlong in some night of fear,
When yell'd the wolf and fled the deer,
Loose crags had toppled o'er ;
And some, chance-poised and balanced, lay,
So that a stripling arm might sway
A mass no host could raise,
In Nature's rage at random thrown,
Yet trembling like the Druid's stone
On its precarious base.

The evening mists, with ceaseless change,
Now clothed the mountains' lofty range,
Now left their foreheads bare,
And round the skirts their mantle furl'd,
Or on the sable waters curl'd,
Or on the eddy breezes whirl'd,
Dispersed in middle air.
And oft, condensed, at once they lower,
When, brief and fierce, the mountain-shower
Pours like a torrent down,
And when return the sun's glad beams,
Whiten'd with foam a thousand streams
Leap from the mountain's crown.

XVI.

"This lake," said Bruce, "whose barriers drear
Are precipices sharp and sheer,
Yielding no track for goat or deer,
Save the black shelves we tread,
How term you its dark waves? and how
Yon northern mountain's pathless brow,
And yonder peak of dread,
That to the evening sun uplifts
The griesly gulfs and slaty rifts,
Which seam its shiver'd head?"—
"Coriskin call the dark lake's name,
Coolin the ridge, as bards proclaim,
From old Cuchullin, chief of fame.

But bards, familiar in our isles
Rather with Nature's frowns than smiles,
Full oft their careless humours please
By sportive names from scenes like these.
I would old Torquil were to show
His maidens with their breasts of snow
Or that my noble Liege were nigh
To hear his Nurse sing lullaby!
(The Maids—tall cliffs with breakers white,
The Nurse—a torrent's roaring might,)
Or that your eye could see the mood
Of Corryvreckin's whirlpool rude,
When dons the Hag her whiten'd hood—
'Tis thus our islesmen's fancy frames,
For scenes so stern, fantastic names."

XVII.

Answer'd The Bruce, "And musing mind
Might here a graver moral find.
These mighty cliffs, that heave on high
Their naked brows to middle sky,
Indifferent to the sun or snow,
Where nought can fade, and nought can blow,
May they not mark a Monarch's fate,—
Raised high 'mid storms of strife and state,
Beyond life's lowlier pleasures placed,
His soul a rock, his heart a waste ?

O'er hope and love and fear aloft
High rears his crowned head—But soft !
Look, underneath yon jutting crag,
Are hunters and a slaughter'd stag.
Who may they be ? But late you said
No steps these desert regions tread ?"—

XVIII.

"So said I—and believed in sooth,"
Ronald replied, "I spoke the truth.
Yet now I spy, by yonder stone,
Five men—they mark us, and come on ;
And by their badge on bonnet borne,
I guess them of the land of Lorn,
Foes to my Liege."—"So let it be ;
I've faced worse odds than five to three—
But the poor page can little aid ;
Then be our battle thus array'd,
If our free passage they contest ;
Cope thou with two, I'll match the rest."—
"Not so, my Liege—for, by my life,
This sword shall meet the treble strife ;
My strength, my skill in arms, more small,
And less the loss should Ronald fall.
But islesmen soon to soldiers grow,
Allan has sword as well as bow,
And were my Monarch's order given,
Two shafts should make our number even."—

“No ! not to save my life !” he said ;
“ Enough of blood rests on my head,
Too rashly spill’d—we soon shall know
Whether they come as friend or foe.”

XIX.

Nigh came the strangers, and more nigh ;—
Still less they pleased the Monarch’s eye.
Men were they all of evil mien,
Down-look’d, unwilling to be seen ;
They moved with half-resolved pace,
And bent on earth each gloomy face.
The foremost two were fair array’d,
With brogue and bonnet, trews and plaid,
And bore the arms of mountaineers,
Daggers and broadswords, bows and spears.
The three, that lagg’d small space behind,
Seem’d serfs of more degraded kind ;
Goat-skins or deer-hides o’er them cast,
Made a rude fence against the blast ;
Their arms and feet and heads were bare,
Matted their beards, unshorn their hair ;
For arms, the caitiffs bore in hand,
A club, an axe, a rusty brand.

XX.

Onward, still mute, they kept the track ;—
“ Tell who ye be, or else stand back,”

Said Bruce ; " In deserts when they meet,
Men pass not as in peaceful street."
Still, at his stern command, they stood,
And proffer'd greeting brief and rude,
But acted courtesy so ill,
As seem'd of fear, and not of will.
" Wanderers we are, as you may be ;
Men hither driven by wind and sea,
Who, if you list to taste our cheer,
Will share with you this fallow deer."—
" If from the sea, where lies your bark ?"
" Ten fathom deep in ocean dark !
Wreck'd yesternight : but we are men,
Who little sense of peril ken.
The shades come down—the day is shut—
Will you go with us to our hut ?"—
" Our vessel waits us in the bay ;
Thanks for your proffer—have good-day."—
" Was that your galley, then, which rode
Not far from shore when evening glow'd ?"—
" It was."—" Then spare your needless pain,
There will she now be sought in vain.
We saw her from the mountain head,
When, with St. George's blazon red
A southern vessel bore in sight,
And yours raised sail, and took to flight."—

XXI.

“ Now, by the rood, unwelcome news ! ”
Thus with Lord Ronald communed Bruce ;
“ Nor rests there light enough to show
If this their tale be true or no.
The men seem bred of churlish kind,
Yet mellow nuts have hardest rind ;
We will go with them—food and fire
And sheltering roof our wants require.
Sure guard ’gainst treachery will we keep,
And watch by turns our comrades’ sleep.—
Good fellows, thanks ; your guests we’ll be,
And well will pay the courtesy.
Come, lead us where your lodging lies,—
Nay, soft ! we mix not companies.—
Show us the path o’er crag and stone,
And we will follow you ;—lead on.”

XXII.

They reach’d the dreary cabin, made
Of sails against a rock display’d,
And there, on entering, found
A slender boy, whose form and mien
Ill suited with such savage scene,
In cap and cloak of velvet green,
Low seated on the ground.
His garb was such as minstrels wear,
Dark was his hue, and dark his hair,

His youthful cheek was marr'd by care,
His eyes in sorrow drown'd.
"Whence this poor boy?"—As Ronald spoke,
The voice his trance of anguish broke;
As if awaked from ghastly dream,
He raised his head with start and scream,
And wildly gazed around;
Then to the wall his face he turn'd,
And his dark neck with blushes burn'd.

XXIII.

"Whose is the boy?" again he said.
"By chance of war our captive made;
He may be yours, if you should hold
That music has more charms than gold;
For, though from earliest childhood mute,
The lad can deftly touch the lute,
And on the rote and viol play,
And well can drive the time away
For those who love such glee;
For me, the favouring breeze, when loud
It pipes upon the galley's shroud,
Makes blither melody."—
"Hath he, then, sense of spoken sound?"—
"Aye; so his mother bade us know,
A crone in our late shipwreck drown'd,
And hence the silly stripling's woe.

More of the youth I cannot say,
Our captive but since yesterday ;
When wind and weather wax'd so grim,
We little listed think of him.—
But why waste time in idle words ?
Sit to your cheer—unbelt your swords.”
Sudden the captive turn'd his head,
And one quick glance to Ronald sped.
It was a keen and warning look,
And well the Chief the signal took.

XXIV.

“ Kind host,” he said, “ our needs require
A separate board and separate fire ;
For know, that on a pilgrimage
Wend I, my comrade, and this page.
And, sworn to vigil and to fast,
Long as this hallow'd task shall last,
We never doff the plaid or sword,
Or feast us at a stranger's board ;
And never share one common sleep,
But one must still his vigil keep.
Thus, for our separate use, good friend,
We'll hold this hut's remoter end.”—
“ A churlish vow,” the eldest said,
“ And hard, methinks, to be obey'd.
How say you, if, to wreak the scorn
That pays our kindness harsh return,

We should refuse to share our meal?"—
"Then say we that our swords are steel!
And our vow binds us not to fast,
Where gold or force may buy repast."—
Their host's dark brow grew keen and fell,
His teeth are clench'd, his features swell;
Yet sunk the felon's moody ire
Before Lord Ronald's glance of fire,
Nor could his craven courage brook
The Monarch's calm and dauntless look.
With laugh constrain'd,—“Let every man
Follow the fashion of his clan!
Each to his separate quarters keep,
And feed or fast, or wake or sleep.”

XXV.

Their fire at separate distance burns,
By turns they eat, keep guard by turns;
For evil seem'd that old man's eye,
Dark and designing, fierce yet shy.
Still he avoided forward look,
But slow and circumspectly took
A circling, never-ceasing glance,
By doubt and cunning mark'd at once,
Which shot a mischief-boding ray,
From under eye-brows shagg'd and gray
The younger, too, who seem'd his son,
Had that dark look the timid shun;

The half-clad serfs behind them sate,
And scowl'd a glare 'twixt fear and hate—
Till all, as darkness onward crept,
Couch'd down, and seem'd to sleep, or slept.
Nor he, that boy, whose powerless tongue
Must trust his eyes to wail his wrong,
A longer watch of sorrow made,
But stretch'd his limbs to slumber laid.

XXVI.

Not in his dangerous host confides
The King, but wary watch provides.
Ronald keeps ward till midnight past,
Then wakes the King, young Allan last ;
Thus rank'd, to give the youthful page
The rest required by tender age.
What is Lord Ronald's wakeful thought,
To chase the languor toil hath brought ?—
(For deem not that he deign'd to throw
Much care upon such coward foe,)—
He thinks of lovely Isabel,
When at her foeman's feet she fell,
Nor less when, placed in princely selle,
She glanced on him with favouring eyes,
At Woodstock when he won the prize.
Nor, fair in joy, in sorrow fair,
In pride of place as 'mid despair,
Must she alone engross his care.

His thoughts to his betrothed bride,
To Edith, turn—O how decide,
When here his love and heart are given,
And there his faith stands plight to Heaven !
No drowsy ward 'tis his to keep,
For seldom lovers long for sleep.
Till sung his midnight hymn the owl,
Answer'd the dog-fox with his howl,
Then waked the King—at his request,
Lord Ronald stretch'd himself to rest.

XXVII.

What spell was good King Robert's, say,
To drive the weary night away ?
His was the patriot's burning thought,
Of Freedom's battle bravely fought,
Of castles storm'd, of cities freed,
Of deep design and daring deed,
Of England's roses reft and torn,
Of Scotland's cross in triumph worn,
Of rout and rally, war and truce,—
As heroes think, so thought The Bruce.
No marvel, 'mid such musings high,
Sleep shunn'd the Monarch's thoughtful eye.
Now over Coolin's eastern head
The greyish light begins to spread,
The otter to his cavern drew,
And clamour'd shrill the wakening mew ;

Then watch'd the page—to needful rest
The King resign'd his anxious breast.

XXVIII.

To Allan's eyes was harder task,
The weary watch their safeties ask.
He trimm'd the fire, and gave to shine
With bickering light the splinter'd pine ;
Then gazed awhile, where silent laid
Their hosts were shrouded by the plaid.
But little fear waked in his mind,
For he was bred of martial kind,
And, if to manhood he arrive,
May match the boldest knight alive.
Then thought he of his mother's tower,
His little sisters' greenwood bower,
How there the Easter-gambols pass,
And of Dan Joseph's lengthen'd mass.
But still before his weary eye
In rays prolong'd the blazes die—
Again he roused him—on the lake
Look'd forth, where now the twilight-flake
Of pale cold dawn began to wake.
On Coolin's cliffs the mist lay furl'd,
The morning breeze the lake had curl'd
The short dark waves, heaved to the land,
With ceaseless plash kiss'd cliff or sand ;—

It was a slumbrous sound—he turn'd
To tales at which his youth had burn'd,
Of pilgrim's path by demon cross'd,
Of sprightly elf or yelling ghost,
Of the wild witch's baneful cot,
And mermaid's alabaster grot,
Who bathes her limbs in sunless well
Deep in Strathaird's enchanted cell.
Thither in fancy rapt he flies,
And on his sight the vaults arise ;
That hut's dark walls he sees no more,
His foot is on the marble floor,
And o'er his head the dazzling spars
Gleam like a firmament of stars !
—Hark ! hears he not the sea-nymph speak
Her anger in that thrilling shriek !—
No ! all too late, with Allan's dream
Mingled the captive's warning scream.
As from the ground he strives to start,
A ruffian's dagger finds his heart !
Upwards he casts his dizzy eyes, . . .
Murmurs his master's name, . . . and dies !

XXIX.

Not so awoke the King ! his hand
Snatch'd from the flame a knotted brand,
The nearest weapon of his wrath ;
With this he cross'd the murderer's path,

And venged young Allan well !
The spatter'd brain and bubbling blood
Hiss'd on the half-extinguish'd wood,
The miscreant gasp'd and fell !
Nor rose in peace the Island Lord ;
One caitiff died upon his sword,
And one beneath his grasp lies prone,
In mortal grapple overthrown.
But while Lord Ronald's dagger drank
The life-blood from his panting flank,
The Father-ruffian of the band
Behind him rears a coward hand !
—O for a moment's aid,
Till Bruce, who deals no double blow,
Dash to the earth another foe,
Above his comrade laid !—
And it is gain'd—the captive sprung
On the raised arm, and closely clung,
And, ere he shook him loose,
The master'd felon press'd the ground,
And gasp'd beneath a mortal wound,
While o'er him stands the Bruce.

XXX.

“ Miscreant ! while lasts thy flitting spark,
Give me to know the purpose dark,
That arm'd thy hand with murderous knife,
Against offenceless stranger's life ? ”—

“ No stranger thou ! ” with accent fell,
Murmur’d the wretch ; “ I know thee well ;
And know thee for the foeman sworn
Of my high Chief, the mighty Lorn.”—
“ Speak yet again, and speak the truth
For thy soul’s sake !—from whence this youth ?
His country, birth, and name declare,
And thus one evil deed repair.”—
—“ Vex me no more ! . . . my blood runs cold . . .
No more I know than I have told,
We found him in a bark we sought
With different purpose . . . and I thought” . . .
Fate cut him short ; in blood and broil,
As he had lived, died Cormac Doil.

XXXI.

Then resting on his bloody blade,
The valiant Bruce to Ronald said,
“ Now shame upon us both !—that boy
 Lifts his mute face to heaven,
And clasps his hands, to testify
His gratitude to God on high,
 For strange deliverance given.
His speechless gesture thanks hath paid
Which our free tongues have left unsaid ! ”
He raised the youth with kindly word,
But mark’d him shudder at the sword :

He cleansed it from its hue of death,
And plunged the weapon in its sheath.
“Alas, poor child! unfitting part
Fate doom’d, when with so soft a heart,
 And form so slight as thine,
She made thee first a pirate’s slave,
Then, in his stead, a patron gave
 Of wayward lot like mine ;
A landless prince, whose wandering life
Is but one scene of blood and strife—
Yet scant of friends The Bruce shall be,
But he’ll find resting-place for thee.—
Come, noble Ronald! o’er the dead
Enough thy generous grief is paid,
And well has Allan’s fate been wroke ;
Come, wend we hence—the day has broke.
Seek we our bark—I trust the tale
Was false, that she had hoisted sail.”

XXXII.

Yet, ere they left that charnel-cell,
The Island Lord bade sad farewell
To Allan :—“ Who shall tell this tale ;”
He said, “ in halls of Donagaile !
Oh, who his widow’d mother tell,
That, ere his bloom, her fairest fell !—
Rest thee, poor youth ! and trust my care
For mass and knell and funeral prayer ;

While o'er those caitiffs, where they lie,
The wolf shall snarl, the raven cry!"
And now the eastern mountain's head
On the dark lake threw lustre red;
Bright gleams of gold and purple streak
Ravine and precipice and peak—
(So earthly power at distance shows;
Reveals his splendour, hides his woes).
O'er sheets of granite, dark and broad,
Rent and unequal, lay the road,
In sad discourse the warriors wind,
And the mute captive moves behind.







STAFFA

" Here, as to shame the temples deck'd
By skill of earthly architect.
Nature itself it seemed would raise
A Minster to her Maker's praise."



I.

STRANGER ! if e'er thine ardent step hath traced,
The northern realms of ancient Caledon,
Where the proud Queen of Wilderness hath placed,
By lake and cataract, her lonely throne ;
Sublime but sad delight thy soul hath known,
Gazing on pathless glen and mountain high,
Listing where from the cliffs the torrents thrown
Mingle their echoes with the eagle's cry,
And with the sounding lake, and with the moaning sky.

Yes ! 'twas sublime, but sad—The loneliness
Loaded thy heart, the desert tired thine eye ;



STAFFA.

"Here, as to shame the temples deck'd
By skill of earthly architect.
Nature itself it seemed would raise
A Minster to her Maker's praise."



!

And strange and awful fears began to press
Thy bosom with a stern solemnity.
Then hast thou wish'd some woodman's cottage nigh,
Something that show'd of life, though low and mean ;
Glad sight, its curling wreath of smoke to spy,
Glad sound, its cock's blithe carol would have been.
Or children whooping wild beneath the willows green.

Such are the scenes, where savage grandeur wakes
An awful thrill that softens into sighs ;
Such feelings rouse them by dim Rannoch's lakes,
In dark Glencoe such gloomy raptures rise :
Or farther, where, beneath the northern skies,
Chides with Loch Eribol his caverns hoar—
But, be the minstrel judge, they yield the prize
Of desert dignity to that dread shore,
That sees grim Coolin rise, and hears Coriskin roar.

II.

Through such wild scenes the champion pass'd,
When bold halloo, and bugle-blast,
Upon the breeze came loud and fast.
" There," said The Bruce, " rung Edward's horn !
What can have caused such brief return ?
And see, brave Ronald,—see him dart
O'er stock and stone like hunted hart,
Precipitate, as is the use
In war or sport, of Edward Bruce.

—He marks us, and his eager cry
Will tell his news ere he be nigh."

III.

Loud Edward shouts, "What make ye here,
Warring upon the mountain-deer,
 When Scotland wants her King?
A bark from Lennox cross'd our track,
With her in speed I hurried back,
 These joyful news to bring—
The Stewart stirs in Teviotdale,
And Douglas wakes his native vale!
Thy storm-toss'd fleet hath won its way
With little loss to Brodick-Bay,
And Lennox, with a gallant band,
Waits but thy coming and command
To waft them o'er to Carrick strand.
There are blithe news!—but mark the close!
Edward, the deadliest of our foes,
As with his host he northward pass'd,
Hath on the borders breath'd his last."

IV.

Still stood The Bruce—his steady cheek
Was little wont his joy to speak,
 But then his colour rose:
"Now Scotland! shortly shalt thou see,

With God's high will, thy children free,
And vengeance on thy foes !
Yet to no sense of selfish wrongs,
Bear witness with me, Heaven, belongs
My joy o'er Edward's bier ;
I took my knighthood at his hand,
And lordship held of him, and land,
And well may vouch it here,
That, blot the story from his page,
Of Scotland ruin'd in his rage,
You read a monarch brave and sage,
And to his people dear."—
" Let London's burghers mourn her Lord,
And Croydon monks his praise record,"
The eager Edward said ;
" Eternal as his own, my hate
Surmounts the bounds of mortal fate,
And dies not with the dead !
Such hate was his on Solway's strand,
When vengeance clench'd his palsied hand,
That pointed yet to Scotland's land,
As his last accents pray'd
Disgrace and curse upon his heir,
If he one Scottish head should spare,
Till stretched upon the bloody lair
Each rebel corpse was laid !
Such hate was his, when his last breath
Renounced the peaceful house of death,

And bade his bones to Scotland's coast
Be borne by his remorseless host,
As if his dead and stony eye
Could still enjoy her misery !
Such hate was his—dark, deadly, long ;
Mine,—as enduring, deep, and strong ! ”

V.

“ Let women, Edward, war with words,
With curses monks, but men with swords :
Nor doubt of living foes, to sate
Deepest revenge and deadliest hate.
Now, to the sea ! behold the beach,
And see the galleys' pendants stretch
Their fluttering length down favouring gale !
Aboard, aboard ! and hoist the sail.
Hold we our way for Arran first,
Where meet in arms our friends dispersed ;
Lennox the loyal, De la Haye,
And Boyd the bold in battle fray
I long the hardy band to head,
And see once more my standard spread. —
Does noble Ronald share our course,
Or stay to raise his island force ? ” —
“ Come weal, come woe, by Bruce's side,”
Replied the Chief, “ will Ronald bide.
And since two galleys yonder ride,

Be mine, so please my Liege, dismiss'd
To wake to arms the clans of Uist,
And all who hear the Minche's roar
On the Long Island's lonely shore.
The nearer Isles, with slight delay,
Ourselves may summon in our way ;
And soon on Arran's shore shall meet,
With Torquil's aid, a gallant fleet,
If aught avails their Chieftain's hest
Among the islesmen of the west."

VI.

Thus was their venturous council said.
But, ere their sails the galleys spread,
Coriskin dark and Coolin high
Echoed the dirge's doleful cry.
Along that sable lake pass'd slow,—
Fit scene for such a sight of woe,—
The sorrowing islesmen, as they bore
The murder'd Allan to the shore.
At every pause, with dismal shout,
Their coronach of grief rung out,
And ever, when they moved again,
The pipes resumed their clamorous strain,
And, with the pibroch's shrilling wail,
Mourn'd the young heir of Donagaile.
Round and around, from cliff and cave,
His answer stern old Coolin gave,

Till high upon his misty side
Languish'd the mournful notes, and died.
For never sounds, by mortal made,
Attain'd his high and haggard head,
That echoes but the tempest's moan,
Or the deep thunder's rending groan.

VII.

Merrily, merrily bounds the bark,
 She bounds before the gale,
The mountain breeze from Ben-na-darch
 Is joyous in her sail !
With fluttering sound, like laughter hoarse,
 The cords and canvass strain,
The waves, divided by her force,
In rippling eddies chased her course,
 As if they laugh'd again.
Not down the breeze more blithely flew,
Skimming the wave, the light sea-mew,
 Than the gay galley bore
Her course upon that favouring wind,
And Coolin's crest has sunk behind.
 And Slapin's cavern'd shore.
'Twas then that warlike signals wake
Dunscaith's dark towers and Eisord's lake,
And soon, from Cavilgarrigh's head,
Thick wreaths of edying smoke were spread ;

A summons these of war and wrath
To the brave clans of Sleat and Strath,
 And, ready at the sight,
Each warrior to his weapons sprung,
And targe upon his shoulder flung
 Impatient for the fight.
Mac-Kinnon's chief, in warfare gray,
Had charge to muster their array,
And guide their barks to Brodick-Bay.

VIII.

Signal of Ronald's high command,
A beacon gleam'd o'er sea and land,
From Canna's tower, that, steep and gray,
Like falcon nest o'erhangs the bay.
Seek not the giddy crag to climb,
To view the turret scathed by time ;
It is a task of doubt and fear
To aught but goat or mountain-deer.
 But rest thee on the silver beach,
And let the aged herdsman teach
 His tale of former day ;
His cur's wild clamour he shall chide,
And for thy seat by ocean's side,
 His varied plaid display ;
Then tell, how with their Chieftain came,
In ancient times, a foreign dame
 To yonder turret gray.

Stern was her Lord's suspicious mind,
Who in so rude a jail confined
 So soft and fair a thrall !
And oft, when moon on ocean slept,
That lovely lady sate and wept
 Upon the castle-wall,
And turned her eye to southern climes,
And thought perchance of happier times,
And touch'd her lute by fits, and sung
Wild ditties in her native tongue.
And still, when on the cliff and bay
Placid and pale the moonbeams play,
 And every breeze is mute,
Upon the lone Hebridean's ear
Steals a strange pleasure mix'd with fear,
While from that cliff he seems to hear
 The murmur of a lute,
And sounds, as of a captive lone,
That mourns her woes in tongue unknown.—
Strange is the tale—but all too long
Already hath it staid the song—
 Yet who may pass them by,
That crag and tower in ruins gray,
Nor to their hapless tenant pay
 The tribute of a sigh !

IX.

Merrily, merrily bounds the bark
O'er the broad ocean driven,
Her path by Ronin's mountains dark
The steersman's hand hath given.
And Ronin's mountains dark have sent
Their hunters to the shore,
And each his ashen bow unbent,
And gave his pastime o'er,
And at the Island Lord's command,
For hunting spear took warrior's brand.
On Scooreigg next a warning light
Summon'd her warriors to the fight ;
A numerous race, ere stern Macleod
O'er their bleak shores in vengeance strode,
When all in vain the ocean-cave
Its refuge to his victims gave.
The Chief, relentless in his wrath,
With blazing heath blockades the path ;
In dense and stifling volumes roll'd,
The vapour filled the cavern'd hold !
The warrior-threat, the infant's plain,
The mother's screams, were heard in vain ;
The vengeful Chief maintains his fires,
Till in the vault a tribe expires !
The bones which strew that cavern's gloom,
Too well attest their dismal doom.

X.

Merrily, merrily goes the bark
On a breeze from the northward free,
So shoots through the morning sky the lark,
Or the swan through the summer sea.
The shores of Mull on the eastward lay,
And Ulva dark and Colonsay,
And all the group of islets gay
That guard famed Staffa round.
Then all unknown its columns rose,
Where dark and undisturbed repose
The cormorant had found,
And the shy seal had quiet home,
And welter'd in that wondrous dome,
Where, as to shame the temples deck'd
By skill of earthly architect,
Nature herself, it seem'd, would raise
A Minster to her Maker's praise !
Not for a meaner use ascend
Her columns, or her arches bend ;
Not of a theme less solemn tells
That mighty surge that ebbs and swells,
And still, between each awful pause,
From the high vault an answer draws,
In varied tone prolong'd and high,
That mocks the organ's melody.
Nor doth its entrance front in vain
To old Iona's holy fane,

That Nature's voice might seem to say,
"Well hast thou done, frail Child of clay!
Thy humble powers that stately shrine
Task'd high and hard—but witness mine!"

XI.

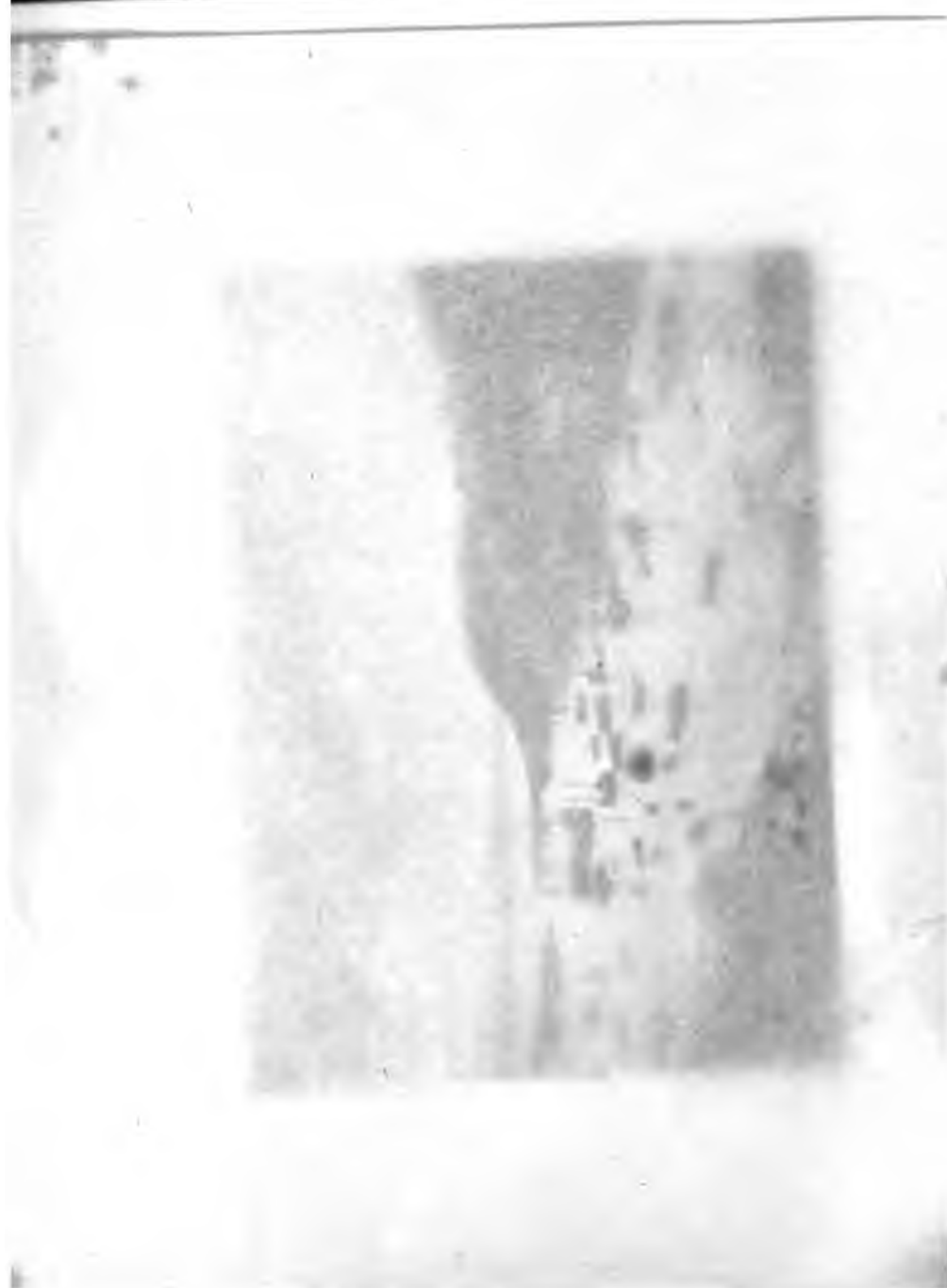
Merrily, merrily goes the bark,
Before the gale she bounds;
So darts the dolphin from the shark,
Or the deer before the hounds.
They left Loch-Tua on their lee,
And they waken'd the men of the wild Tiree,
And the Chief of the sandy Coll;
They pause not at Columba's isle,
Though peal'd the bells from the holy pile
With long and measured toll;
No time for matin or for mass,
And the sounds of the holy summons pass
Away in the billows' roll.
Lochbuie's fierce and warlike Lord
Their signal saw, and grasp'd his sword,
And verdant Islay call'd her host,
And the clans of Jura's rugged coast
Lord Ronald's call obey,
And Scarba's isle, whose tortured shore
Still rings to Corrievreken's roar,
And lonely Colonsay;

THE LORD OF THE ISLES.

scenes sung by him who sings no more !
bright and brief career is o'er,
And mute his tuneful strains ;
ench'd is his lamp of varied lore,
It loved the light of song to pour ;
istant and a deadly shore
Has LEYDEN'S cold remains !

XII.

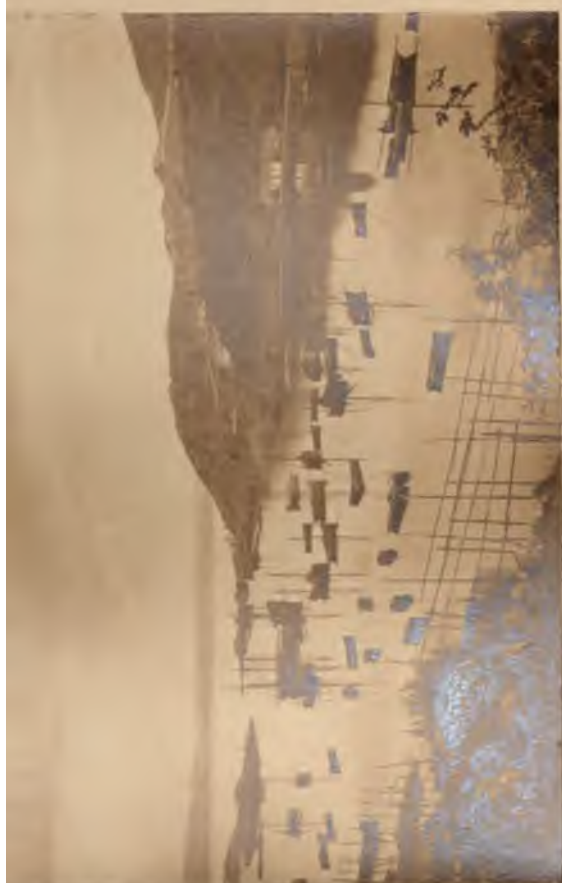
er the breeze blows merrily,
the galley ploughs no more the sea.
t, rounding wild Cantyre, they meet
southern foemen's watchful fleet,
They held unwonted way ;—
Tarbat's western lake they bore,
en dragg'd their bark the isthmus o'er,
far at Kilmaconnel's shore,
Upon the eastern bay.
was a wondrous sight to see
mast and pennon glitter free
h raised above the greenwood tree,
on dry land the galley moves,
cliff and copse and alder groves.
p import from that selcouth sign,
many a mountain Seer divine,
ancient legends told the Gael,
at when a royal bark should sail
O'er Kilmaconnel moss,





—

—



TAREET



Old Albyn should in fight prevail,
And every foe should faint and quail
Before her silver Cross.

XIII.

Now launch'd once more, the inland sea
They furrow with fair augury,
And steer for Arran's isle :
The sun, ere yet he sunk behind
Ben-Ghoil, " the Mountain of the Wind,"
Gave his grim peaks a greeting kind,
And bade Loch Ranza smile.
Thither their destined course they drew ;
It seem'd the isle her monarch knew,
So brilliant was the landward view,
The ocean so serene ;
Each puny wave in diamonds roll'd
O'er the calm deep, where hues of gold
With azure strove and green.
The hill, the vale, the tree, the tower,
Glow'd with the tints of evening's hour,
The beach was silver sheen,
The wind breathed soft as lover's sigh,
And, oft renew'd, seem'd oft to die,
With breathless pause between.
O who, with speech of war and woes,
Would wish to break the soft repose
Of such enchanting scene !

XIV.

Is it of war Lord Ronald speaks ?
The blush that dies his manly cheeks,
The timid look, and downcast eye,
And faltering voice the theme deny.
And good King Robert's brow express'd,
He pondered o'er some high request,
As doubtful to approve ;
Yet in his eye and lip the while,
Dwelt the half-pitying glance and smile,
Which manhood's graver mood beguile,
When lovers talk of love.
Anxious his suit Lord Ronald pled ;—
“ And for my bride betrothed,” he said,
“ My Liege has heard the rumour spread
Of Edith from Artornish fled.
Too hard her fate—I claim no right
To blame her for her hasty flight ;
Be joy and happiness her lot !—
But she hath fled the bridal-knot,
And Lorn recall'd his promised plight,
In the assembled chieftains' sight.—
When, to fulfil our fathers' band,
I proffer'd all I could—my hand—
I was repulsed with scorn ;
Mine honour I should ill assert,
And worse the feelings of my heart,

If I should play a suitor's part
Again, to pleasure Lorn."

XV.

"Young Lord," the royal Bruce replied,
"That question must the Church decide :
Yet seems it hard, since rumours state
Edith takes Clifford for her mate,
The very tie, which she hath broke,
To thee should still be binding yoke.
But, for my sister Isabel—
The mood of woman who can tell ?
I guess the Champion of the Rock,
Victorious in the tourney shock,
That knight unknown, to whom the prize
She dealt,—had favour in her eyes ;
But since our brother Nigel's fate,
Our ruin'd house and hapless state,
From worldly joy and hope estranged,
Much is the hapless mourner changed.
Perchance," here smiled the noble King,
"This tale may other musings bring.
Soon shall we know—yon mountains hide
The little convent of Saint Bride ;
There, sent by Edward, she must stay,
Till fate shall give more prosperous day ;
And thither will I bear thy suit,
Nor will thine advocate be mute."

XVI.

As thus they talk'd in earnest mood,
That speechless boy beside them stood.
He stoop'd his head against the mast,
And bitter sobs came thick and fast,
A grief that would not be repress'd,
But seem'd to burst his youthful breast.
His hands, against his forehead held,
As if by force his tears repell'd,
But through his fingers, long and slight,
Fast trill'd the drops of crystal bright.
Edward, who walk'd the deck apart,
First spied this conflict of the heart.
Thoughtless as brave, with bluntness kind
He sought to cheer the sorrower's mind;
By force the slender hand he drew
From those poor eyes that stream'd with dew.
As in his hold the stripling strove,—
('Twas a rough grasp, though meant in love,)
Away his tears the warrior swept,
And bade shame on him that he wept.
“ I would to Heaven thy helpless tongue
Could tell me who hath wrought thee wrong!
For, were he of our crew the best,
The insult went not unredress'd.
Come, cheer thee; thou art now of age
To be a warrior's gallant page;

Thou shalt be mine !—a palfrey fair
O'er hill and holt my boy shall bear,
To hold my bow in hunting grove,
Or speed on errand to my love ;
For well I wot thou wilt not tell
The temple where my wishes dwell."

XVII.

Bruce interposed,—“ Gay Edward, no,
This is no youth to hold thy bow,
To fill thy goblet, or to bear
Thy message light to lighter fair.
Thou art a patron all too wild
And thoughtless, for this orphan child.
See'st thou not how apart he steals,
Keeps lonely couch and lonely meals ?
Fitter by far in yon calm cell
To tend our sister Isabel,
With Father Augustin to share
The peaceful change of convent prayer,
Than wander wild adventures through,
With such a reckless guide as you.”—
“ Thanks, brother ! ” Edward answer'd gay
“ For the high laud thy words convey !
But we may learn some future day,
If thou or I can this poor boy
Protect the best, or best employ.

Meanwhile, our vessel nears the strand;
Launch we the boat, and seek the land."

XVIII.

To land King Robert lightly sprung,
And thrice aloud his bugle rung
With note prolong'd and varied strain,
Till bold Ben-Ghoil replied again.
Good Douglas then, and De la Haye,
Had in a glen a hart at bay,
And Lennox cheer'd the laggard hounds,
When waked that horn the greenwood bounds.
"It is the foe!" cried Boyd, who came
In breathless haste, with eye of flame,—
"It is the foe!—Each valiant lord
Fling by his bow, and grasp his sword!"—
"Not so," replied the good Lord James,
"That blast no English bugle claims.
Oft have I heard it fire the fight,
Cheer the pursuit, or stop the flight.
Dead were my heart, and deaf mine ear,
If Bruce should call, nor Douglas hear!
Each to Loch Ranza's margin spring!
That blast was winded by the King!"

XIX.

Fast to their mates the tidings spread,
And fast to shore the warriors sped.

Bursting from glen and greenwood tree,
High waked their loyal jubilee !
Around the royal Bruce they crowd,
And clasp'd his hands, and wept aloud.
Veterans of early fields were there,
Whose helmets press'd their hoary hair,
Whose swords and axes bore a stain
From life-blood of the red-hair'd Dane ;
And boys, whose hands scarce brook'd to wield
The heavy sword or bossy shield.
Men too were there, that bore the scars
Impress'd in Albyn's woeful wars,
At Falkirk's fierce and fatal fight,
Teyndrum's dread rout, and Methven's flight ;
The might of Douglas there was seen,
There Lennox with his graceful mien ;
Kirkpatrick, Closeburn's dreaded Knight ;
The Lindsay, fiery, fierce, and light ;
The heir of murder'd De la Haye,
And Boyd the grave, and Seton gay.
Around their King regain'd they press'd,
Wept, shouted, clasp'd him to their breast,
And young and old, and serf and lord,
And he who ne'er unsheathed a sword,
And he in many a peril tried,
Alike resolved the brunt to bide,
And live or die by Bruce's side !

XX.

Oh, War! thou hast thy fierce delight,
Thy gleams of joy, intensely bright !
Such gleams, as from thy polished shield
Fly dazzling o'er the battle-field !
Such transports wake, severe and high,
Amid the pealing conquest-cry ;
Scarce less, when, after battle lost,
Mustering the remnants of a host,
And as each comrade's name they tell,
Who in the well-fought conflict fell,
Knitting stern brow o'er flashing eye,
Vow to avenge them or to die !—
Warriors!—and where are warriors found,
If not on martial Britain's ground ?
And who, when waked with note of fire,
Love more than they the British lyre ?—
Know ye not,—hearts to honour dear !
That joy, deep-thrilling, stern, severe,
At which the heart-strings vibrate high,
And wake the fountains of the eye ?
And blame ye, then, The Bruce, if trace
Of tear is on his manly face,
When, scanty relics of the train
That hail'd at Scone his early reign,
This patriot band around him hung,
And to his knees and bosom clung ?—

Blame ye The Bruce ?—his brother blamed,
But shared the weakness, while ashamed,
With haughty laugh his head he turn'd,
And dash'd away the tear he scorn'd.

XXI.

'Tis morning, and the Convent bell
Long time had ceased its matin knell,
 Within thy walls, Saint Bride !
An aged Sister sought the cell
Assign'd to Lady Isabel,
 And hurriedly she cried,
" Haste, gentle Lady, haste—there waits
A noble stranger at the gates ;
Saint Bride's poor vot'ress ne'er has seen
A Knight of such a princely mien ;
His errand, as he bade me tell,
Is with the Lady Isabel."
The princess rose,—for on her knee
Low bent she told her rosary,—
" Let him by thee his purpose teach :
I may not give a stranger speech."—
Saint Bride forefend, thou royal Maid !"
The portress cross'd herself, and said,—
" Not to be prioress might I
Debate his will, his suit deny."—
" Has earthly show then, simple fool,
Power o'er a sister of thy rule,

And art thou, like the worldly train,
Subdued by splendours light and vain ?"—

XXII.

"No, Lady! in old eyes like mine,
Gauds have no glitter, gems no shine;
Nor grace his rank attendants vain,
One youthful page is all his train.
It is the form, the eye, the word,
The bearing of that stranger Lord,
His stature, manly, bold, and tall,
Built like a castle's battled wall,
Yet moulded in such just degrees,
His giant-strength seems lightsome ease.
Close as the tendrils of the vine
His locks upon his forehead twine,
Jet-black, save where some touch of gray
Has ta'en the youthful hue away,
Weather and war their rougher trace
Have left on that majestic face;—
But 'tis his dignity of eye!
There, if a suppliant, would I fly,
Secure, 'mid danger, wrongs, and grief,
Of sympathy, redress, relief—
That glance, if guilty, would I dread
More than the doom that spoke me dead!"—
"Enough, enough," the princess cried,
"'Tis Scotland's hope, her joy, her pride!

To meaner front was ne'er assign'd
Such mastery o'er the common mind—
Bestow'd thy high designs to aid,
How long, O Heaven! how long delay'd!
Haste, Mona, haste, to introduce
My darling brother, royal Bruce!"

XXIII.

They met like friends who part in pain,
And meet in doubtful hope again.
But when subdued that fitful swell,
The Bruce survey'd the humble cell;—
"And this is thine, poor Isabel!—
That pallet-couch, and naked wall,
For room of state, and bed of pall;
For costly robes and jewels rare,
A string of beads and zone of hair;
And for the trumpet's sprightly call
To sport or banquet, grove or hall,
The bell's grim voice divides thy care,
'Twixt hours of penitence and prayer!
O ill for thee, my royal claim
From the First David's sainted name!
O woe for thee, that while he sought
His right, thy brother feebly fought!"—

XXIV.

"Now lay these vain regrets aside,
And be the unshaken Bruce!" she cried.

“For more I glory to have shared
The woes thy venturous spirit dared,
When raising first thy valiant band
In rescue of thy native land,
Than had fair Fortune set me down
The partner of an empire’s crown.
And grieve not that on Pleasure’s stream
No more I drive in giddy dream,
For Heaven the erring pilot knew,
And from the gulf the vessel drew,
Tried me with judgments stern and great,
My house’s ruin, thy defeat,
Poor Nigel’s death, till, tamed, I own,
My hopes are fixed on Heaven alone ;
Nor e’er shall earthly prospects win
My heart to this vain world of sin.”—

XXV.

“Nay, Isabel, for such stern choice,
First wilt thou wait thy brother’s voice ;
Then ponder if in convent scene
No softer thoughts might intervene—
Say they were of that unknown Knight,
Victor in Woodstock’s tourney-fight—
Nay, if his name such blush you owe,
Victorious o’er a fairer foe !”
Truly his penetrating eye
Hath caught that blush’s passing dye,—

Like the last beam of evening thrown
On a white cloud,—just seen and gone.
Soon with calm cheek and steady eye,
The princess made composed reply :—
“ I guess my brother’s meaning well ;
For not so silent is the cell,
But we have heard the islesmen all
Arm in thy cause at Ronald’s call,
And mine eye proves that Knight unknown
And the brave Island Lord are one.—
Had then his suit been earlier made,
In his own name, with thee to aid,
(But that his plighted faith forbade,)
I know not But thy page so near ?—
This is no tale for menial’s ear.”

XXVI.

Still stood that page, as far apart
As the small cell would space afford ;
With dizzy eye and bursting heart,
He leant his weight on Bruce’s sword,
The monarch’s mantle too he bore,
And drew the fold his visage o’er.
“ Fear not for him—in murderous strife,”
Said Bruce, “ his warning saved my life ;
Full seldom parts he from my side,
And in his silence I confide,
Since he can tell no tale again.

He is a boy of gentle strain,
And I have purposed he shall dwell
In Augustin the chaplain's cell,
And wait on thee, my Isabel.—
Mind not his tears ; I've seen them flow,
As in the thaw dissolves the snow.
'Tis a kind youth, but fanciful,
Unfit against the tide to pull,
And those that with The Bruce would sail,
Must learn to strive with stream and gale.—
But forward, gentle Isabel—
My answer for Lord Ronald tell.”—

XXVII.

“ This answer be to Ronald given—
The heart he asks is fix'd on heaven.
My love was like a summer flower,
That wither'd in the wintry hour,
Born but of vanity and pride
And with these sunny visions died.
If further press his suit—then say,
He should his plighted troth obey,
Troth plighted both with ring and word,
And sworn on crucifix and sword.—
Oh, shame thee, Robert ! I have seen
Thou hast a woman's guardian been !
Even in extremity's dread hour,
When press'd on thee the Southern power,

And safety, to all human sight,
Was only found in rapid flight,
Thou heard'st a wretched female plain
In agony of travail pain,
And thou didst bid thy little band
Upon the instant turn and stand,
And dare the worst the foe might do,
Rather than, like a knight untrue,
Leave to pursuers merciless
A woman in her last distress.—
And wilt thou now deny thine aid
To an oppressed and injured maid,
Even plead for Ronald's perfidy,
And press his fickle faith on me?—
So witness Heaven, as true I vow,
Had I those earthly feelings now,
Which could my former bosom move
Ere taught to set its hopes above,
I'd spurn each proffer he could bring,
Till at my feet he laid the ring,
The ring and spousal contract both,
And fair acquittal of his oath,
By her who brooks his perjured scorn,
The ill-requited Maid of Lorn!"

XXVIII.

With sudden impulse forward sprung
The page, and on her neck he hung ;

Then, recollected instantly,
His head he stoop'd, and bent his knee,
Kiss'd twice the hand of Isabel,
Arose, and sudden left the cell.—
The princess, loosen'd from his hold,
Blush'd angry at his bearing bold ;
But good King Robert cried,
“ Chafe not—by signs he speaks his mind,
He heard the plan my care design'd,
Nor could his transports hide.—
But, sister, now bethink thee well ;
No easy choice the convent cell ;
Trust, I shall play no tyrant part,
Either to force thy hand or heart,
Or suffer that Lord Ronald scorn,
Or wrong for thee, the Maid of Lorn.’
But think,—not long the time has been,
That thou wert wont to sigh unseen,
And wouldst the ditties best approve,
That told some lay of hapless love.
Now are thy wishes in thy power,
And thou art bent on cloister bower !
O ! if our Edward knew the change,
How would his busy satire range,
With many a sarcasm varied still
On woman’s wish, and woman’s will !”

XXIX.

"Brother, I well believe," she said,
"Even so would Edward's part be play'd.
Kindly in heart, in word severe,
A foe to thought, and grief, and fear,
He holds his humour uncontroll'd ;
But thou art of another mould.
Say then to Ronald, as I say,
Unless before my feet he lay
The ring which bound the faith he swore,
By Edith freely yielded o'er,
He moves his suit to me no more.
Nor do I promise, even if now
He stood absolved of spousal vow,
That I would change my purpose made,
To shelter me in holy shade.—
Brother, for little space, farewell !
To other duties warns the bell."—

XXX.

"Lost to the world," King Robert said,
When he had left the royal maid,
"Lost to the world by lot severe,
O what a gem lies buried here,
Nipp'd by misfortune's cruel frost,
The buds of fair affection lost !—
But what have I with love to do ?
Far sterner cares my lot pursue.

—Pent in this isle we may not lie,
Nor would it long our wants supply.
Right opposite, the mainland towers
Of my own Turnberry court our powers—
—Might not my father's beadsman hoar,
Cuthbert, who dwells upon the shore,
Kindle a signal-flame, to show
The time propitious for the blow ?
It shall be so—some friend shall bear
Our mandate with despatch and care ;
—Edward shall find the messenger.
That fortress ours, the island fleet
May on the coast of Carrick meet.—
O Scotland ! shall it e'er be mine
To wreak thy wrongs in battle-line,
To raise my victor-head, and see
Thy hills, thy dales, thy people free,—
That glance of bliss is all I crave,
Betwixt my labours and my grave !”
Then down the hill he slowly went,
Oft pausing on the steep descent,
And reach'd the spot where his bold train
Held rustic camp upon the plain.







I.

ON fair Loch-Ranza stream'd the early day,
Thin wreaths of cottage-smoke are upward curl'd
From the lone hamlet, which her inland bay
And circling mountains sever from the world.
And there the fisherman his sail unfurl'd,
The goat-herd drove his kids to steep Ben-Ghoil,
Before the hut the dame her spindle twirl'd,
Courting the sunbeam as she plied her toil,—
For, wake where'er he may, Man wakes to care and coil.

But other duties call'd each convent maid,
Roused by the summons of the moss-grown bell ;



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Sung were the matins, and the mass was said,
And every sister sought her separate cell,
Such was the rule, her rosary to tell.
And Isabel has knelt in lonely prayer ;
The sunbeam, through the narrow lattice, fell
Upon the snowy neck and long dark hair,
As stoop'd her gentle head in meek devotion there.

II.

She raised her eyes, that duty done,
When glanced upon the pavement-stone,
Gemm'd and enchased, a golden ring,
Bound to a scroll with silken string,
With few brief words inscribed to tell,
"This for the Lady Isabel."
Within, the writing further bore,—
"'Twas with this ring his plight he swore,
With this his promise I restore ;
To her who can the heart command,
Well may I yield the plighted hand.
And O! for better fortune born,
Grudge not a passing sigh to mourn
Her who was Edith once of Lorn!"
One single flash of glad surprise
Just glanced from Isabel's dark eyes,
But vanish'd in the blush of shame,
That, as its penance, instant came.

“ O thought unworthy of my race !
Selfish, ungenerous, mean, and base,
A moment's throb of joy to own,
That rose upon her hopes o'erthrown !—
Thou pledge of vows too well believed,
Of man ingrate and maid deceived,
Think not thy lustre here shall gain
Another heart to hope in vain !
For thou shalt rest, thou tempting gaud,
Where worldly thoughts are overawed,
And worldly splendours sink debased.”
Then by the cross the ring she placed.

• III.

Next rose the thought,—its owner far,
How came it here through bolt and bar ?
But the dim lattice is ajar.—
She looks abroad—the morning dew
A light short step had brush'd anew,
And there were foot-prints seen
On the carved buttress rising still,
Till on the mossy window-sill
Their track effaced the green.
The ivy-twigs were torn and fray'd,
As if some climber's step to aid.—
But who the hardy messenger,
Whose venturous path these signs infer ?

"Strange doubts are mine!—Mona, draw nigh;
—Nought 'scapes old Mona's curious eye—
What strangers, gentle mother, say,
Have sought these holy walls to-day?"—
"None, Lady, none of note or name;
Only your brother's foot-page came,
At peep of dawn—I pray'd him pass
To chapel where they said the mass;
But like an arrow he shot by,
And tears seem'd bursting from his eye."

IV.

The truth at once on Isabel,
As darted by a sunbeam, fell,—
"'Tis Edith's self!—her speechless woe,
Her form, her looks, the secret show!
—Instant, good Mona, to the bay,
And to my royal brother say,
I do conjure him seek my cell,
With that mute page he loves so well."—
"What! know'st thou not his warlike host
At break of day has left our coast?
My old eyes saw them from the tower.
At eve they couch'd in greenwood bower,
At dawn a bugle-signal, made
By their bold Lord, their ranks array'd;
Up sprung the spears through bush and tree,
No time for benedicite!

Like deer, that, rousing from their lair,
Just shake the dewdrops from their hair,
And toss their armed crests aloft,
Such matins theirs!"—"Good mother, soft—
Where does my brother bend his way?"—
"As I have heard, for Brodick-Bay,
Across the Isle—of barks a score
Lie there, 'tis said, to waft them o'er,
On sudden news, to Carrick-shore."—
"If such their purpose, deep the need,"
Said anxious Isabel, "of speed!
Call Father Augustin, good dame."
The nun obey'd, the Father came.

V.

"Kind Father, hie without delay,
Across the hills to Brodick-Bay.
This message to The Bruce be given;
I pray him, by his hopes of Heaven,
That, till he speak with me, he stay!
Or, if his haste brook no delay,
That he deliver, on my suit,
Into thy charge that stripling mute.
Thus prays his sister Isabel,
For causes more than she may tell—
Away, good Father!—and take heed,
That life and death are on thy speed."

His cowl the good old priest did on,
Took his piked staff and sandall'd shoon,
And, like a palmer bent by eld,
O'er moss and moor his journey held.

VI.

Heavy and dull the foot of age,
And rugged was the pilgrimage ;
But none was there beside, whose care
Might such important message bear.
Through birchen copse he wander'd slow,
Stunted and sapless, thin and low ;
By many a mountain stream he pass'd,
From the tall cliffs in tumult cast,
Dashing to foam their waters dun,
And sparkling in the summer sun.
Round his gray head the wild curlew
In many a fearless circle flew.
O'er chasms he pass'd, where fractures wide
Craved wary eye and ample stride ;
He cross'd his brow beside the stone,
Where Druids erst heard victims groan,
And at the cairns upon the wild,
O'er many a heathen hero piled,
He breathed a timid prayer for those
Who died ere Shiloh's sun arose.
Beside Macfarlane's Cross he staid,

There told his hours within the shade,
And at the stream his thirst allay'd.
Thence onward journeying, slowly still,
As evening closed he reach'd the hill,
Where, rising through the woodland green,
Old Brodick's gothic towers were seen,
From Hastings, late their English Lord,
Douglas had won them by the sword.
The sun that sunk beneath the isle,
Now tinged them with a parting smile.

VII.

But though the beams of light decay,
'Twas bustle all in Brodick-Bay.
The Bruce's followers crowd the shore,
And boats and barges some unmoor,
Some raise the sail, some seize the oar;
Their eyes oft turn'd where glimmer'd far
What might have seem'd an early star
On heaven's blue arch, save that its light
Was all too flickering, fierce, and bright.
Far distant in the south, the ray
Shone pale amid retiring day,
But as, on Carrick shore,
Dim seen in outline faintly blue,
The shades of evening closer drew,
It kindled more and more.

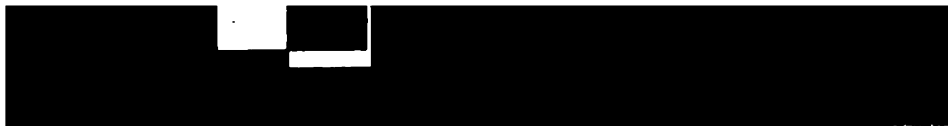
The monk's slow steps now press the sands,
And now amid a scene he stands,

Full strange to churchman's eye ;
Warriors, who, arming for the fight,
Rivet and clasp their harness light,
And twinkling spears, and axes bright,
And helmets flashing high.

Oft, too, with unaccustom'd ears,
A language much unmeet he hears,
While, hastening all on board,
As stormy as the swelling surge
That mix'd its roar, the leaders urge
Their followers to the ocean verge,
With many a haughty word.

VIII.

Through that wild throng the Father pass'd,
And reach'd the royal Bruce at last.
He leant against a stranded boat,
That the approaching tide must float,
And counted every rippling wave,
As higher yet her sides they lave,
And oft the distant fire he eyed,
And closer yet his hauberk tied,
And loosen'd in its sheath his brand.
Edward and Lennox were at hand,
Douglas and Ronald had the care
The soldiers to the barks to share.—





ERODICK BAY AND GOATFELL.



The Monk approach'd and homage paid ;
"And art thou come," King Robert said,
"So far, to bless us ere we part?"—
—"My Liege, and with a loyal heart!—
But other charge I have to tell,"—
And spoke the hest of Isabel.
—"Now by St. Giles," the Monarch cried,
"This moves me much!—this morning tide,
I sent the stripling to Saint Bride,
With my commandment there to bide."—
—"Thither he came the portress show'd,
But there, my Liege, made brief abode."—

IX.

"'Twas I," said Edward, "found employ
Of nobler import for the boy.
Deep pondering in my anxious mind,
A fitting messenger to find,
To bear thy written mandate o'er
To Cuthbert on the Carrick shore,
I chanced, at early dawn, to pass
The chapel gate to snatch a mass.
I found the stripling on a tomb
Low-seated, weeping for the doom
That gave his youth to convent gloom.
I told my purpose, and his eyes
Flash'd joyful at the glad surprise.

He bounded to the skiff, the sail
Was spread before a prosperous gale,
And well my charge he hath obey'd ;
For, see ! the ruddy signal made,
That Clifford, with his merry-men all,
Guards carelessly our father's hall."—

X.

" O wild of thought, and hard of heart !"
Answer'd the Monarch, " on a part
Of such deep danger to employ
A mute, an orphan, and a boy !
Unfit for flight, unfit for strife,
Without a tongue to plead for life !
Now, were my right restored by Heaven,
Edward, my crown I would have given,
Ere, thrust on such adventure wild,
I perill'd thus the helpless child."—
—Offended half, and half submiss,
" Brother and Liege, of blame like this,"
Edward replied, " I little dream'd.
A stranger messenger, I deem'd,
Might safest seek the beadsman's cell,
Where all thy squires are known so well.
Noteless his presence, sharp his sense,
His imperfection his defence.
If seen, none can his errand guess ;
If ta'en, his words no tale express—

Methinks, too, yonder beacon's shine
Might expiate greater fault than mine."—
"Rash," said King Robert, "was the deed—
But it is done.—Embark with speed!—
Good Father, say to Isabel
How this unhappy chance befell;
If well we thrive on yonder shore,
Soon shall my care her page restore.
Our greeting to our sister bear,
And think of us in mass and prayer."—

XI.

"Aye!"—said the Priest, "while this poor hand
Can chalice raise or cross command,
While my old voice has accents' use,
Can Augustin forget The Bruce!"
Then to his side Lord Ronald press'd,
And whisper'd, "Bear thou this request,
That when by Bruce's side I fight,
For Scotland's crown and freedom's right,
The princess grant her knight to bear
Some token of her favouring care;
It shall be shown where England's best
May shrink to see it on my crest.
And for the boy—since weightier care
For royal Bruce the times prepare,
The helpless youth is Ronald's charge,
His couch my plaid, his fence my targe."

He ceased ; for many an eager hand
Had urged the barges from the strand.
Their number was a score and ten,
They bore thrice threescore chosen men.
With such small force did Bruce at last
The die for death or empire cast !

XII.

Now, on the darkening main afloat,
Ready and mann'd rocks every boat ;
Beneath their oars the ocean's might
Was dash'd to sparks of glimmering light.
Faint and more faint, as off they bore,
Their armour glanced against the shore,
And, mingled with the dashing tide,
Their murmuring voices distant died.—
“ God speed them ! ” said the Priest, as dark
On distant billows glides each bark ;
“ O Heaven ! when swords for freedom shine,
And monarch's right, the cause is thine !
Edge doubly every patriot blow !
Beat down the banners of the foe !
And be it to the nations known,
That victory is from God alone ! ”
As up the hill his path he drew,
He turn'd his blessings to renew,
Oft turn'd, till on the darken'd coast
All traces of their course were lost ;

Then slowly bent to Brodick tower,
To shelter for the evening hour.

XIII.

In night the fairy prospects sink,
Where Cumray's isles with verdant link
Close the fair entrance of the Clyde ;
The woods of Bute, no more descried,
Are gone—and on the placid sea
The rowers ply their task with glee,
While hands that knightly lances bore,
Impatient aid the labouring oar
The half-faced moon shone dim and pale,
And glanced against the whiten'd sail ;
But on that ruddy beacon-light
Each steersman kept the helm aright,
And oft, for such the King's command,
That all at once might reach the strand,
From boat to boat loud shout and hail
Warn'd them to crowd or slacken sail.
South and by west the armada bore,
And near at length the Carrick shore.
As less and less the distance grows,
High and more high the beacon rose ;
The light, that seem'd a twinkling star,
Now blazed portentous, fierce, and far.
Dark-red the heaven above it glow'd,
Dark-red the sea beneath it flow'd,

Red rose the rocks on ocean's brim,
In blood-red light her islets swim ;
Wild scream the dazzled sea-fowl gave,
Dropp'd from their crags on plashing wave.
The deer to distant covert drew,
The black-cock deem'd it day, and crew.
Like some tall castle given to flame,
O'er half the land the lustre came.
" Now, good my Liege, and brother sage,
What think ye of mine elfin page ?"—
" Row on !" the noble King replied,
" We'll learn the truth whate'er betide ;
Yet sure the beadsman and the child
Could ne'er have waked that beacon wild."

XIV.

With that the boats approach'd the land,
But Edward's grounded on the sand ;
The eager knight leap'd in the sea
Waist-deep, and first on shore was he,
Though every barge's hardy band
Contended which should gain the land,
When that strange light, which, seen afar,
Seem'd steady as the polar star,
Now, like a prophet's fiery chair,
Seem'd travelling the realms of air.
Wide o'er the sky the splendour glows,
As that portentous meteor rose ;

Helm, axe, and falchion glitter'd bright,
And in the red and dusky light
His comrade's face each warrior saw,
Nor marvell'd it was pale with awe.
Then high in air the beams were lost,
And darkness sunk upon the coast.—
Ronald to Heaven a prayer address'd,
And Douglas cross'd his dauntless breast ;
“ Saint James protect us ? ” Lennox cried,
But reckless Edward spoke aside,
“ Deem'st thou, Kirkpatrick, in that flame
Red Comyn's angry spirit came,
Or would thy dauntless heart endure
Once more to make assurance sure ? ”—
“ Hush ! ” said The Bruce ; “ we soon shall know,
If this be sorcerer's empty show,
Or stratagem of southern foe.
The moon shines out—upon the sand
Let every leader rank his band.”

XV.

Faintly the moon's pale beams supply
That ruddy light's unnatural dye ;
The dubious cold reflection lay
On the wet sands and quiet bay.
Beneath the rocks King Robert drew
His scatter'd files to order due,

Till shield compact and serried spear
In the cool light shone blue and clear.
Then down a path that sought the tide,
That speechless page was seen to glide ;
He knelt him lowly on the sand,
And gave a scroll to Robert's hand.
"A torch," the Monarch cried, "What, ho !
Now shall we Cuthbert's tidings know."
But evil news the letters bare,
The Clifford's force was strong and ware,
Augmented, too, that very morn,
By mountaineers who came with Lorn.
Long harrowed by oppressor's hand,
Courage and faith had fled the land,
And over Carrick, dark and deep,
Had sunk dejection's iron sleep.—
Cuthbert had seen that beacon-flame,
Unwitting from what source it came.
Doubtful of perilous event,
Edward's mute messenger he sent,
If Bruce deceived should venture o'er,
To warn him from the fatal shore.

XVI.

As round the torch the leaders crowd,
Bruce read these chilling news aloud.
"What council, nobles, have we now !—
To ambush us in greenwood bough,

And take the chance which fate may send
To bring our enterprise to end,
Or shall we turn us to the main
As exiles, and embark again ?"—
Answer'd fierce Edward, " Hap what may,
In Carrick, Carrick's Lord must stay.
I would not minstrels told the tale
Wildfire or meteor made us quail."
Answer'd The Douglas, " If my Liege
May win yon walls by storm or siege,
Then were each brave and patriot heart
Kindled of new for loyal part."—
Answer'd Lord Ronald, " Not for shame
Would I that aged Torquil came,
And found, for all our empty boast,
Without a blow we fled the coast.
I will not credit that this land,
So famed for warlike heart and hand,
The nurse of Wallace and of Bruce,
Will long with tyrants hold a truce."—
" Prove we our fate—the brunt we'll bide !"
So Boyd and Haye and Lennox cried ;
So said, so vow'd, the leaders all ;
So Bruce resolved : " And in my hall
Since the bold Southrons make their home,
The hour of payment soon shall come,
When with a rough and rugged host
Clifford may reckon to his cost.

Meantime, through well-known bosk and dell,
I'll lead where we may shelter well."

XVII.

Now ask you whence that wondrous light,
Whose fairy glow beguiled their sight?—
It ne'er was known—yet gray-hair'd eld
A superstitious credence held,
That never did a mortal hand
Wake its broad glare on Carrick strand;
Nay, and that on the self-same night
When Bruce cross'd o'er, still gleams the light.
Yearly it gleams o'er mount and moor,
And glittering wave and crimson'd shore—
But whether beam celestial, lent
By Heaven to aid the King's descent,
Or fire hell-kindled from beneath,
To lure him to defeat and death,
Or were it but some meteor strange,
Of such as oft through midnight range,
Startling the traveller late and lone,
I know not—and it ne'er was known.

XVIII.

Now up the rocky pass they drew,
And Ronald, to his promise true,
Still made his arm the stripling's stay,
To aid him on the rugged way.

“ Now cheer thee, simple Amadine !
Why throbs that silly heart of thine ? ”—
—That name the pirates to their slave
(In Gaelic 'tis the Changeling) gave—
“ Dost thou not rest thee on my arm ?
Do not my plaid-folds hold thee warm ?
Hath not the wild bull's treble hide
This targe for thee and me supplied ;
Is not Clan-Colla's sword of steel ?
And, trembler, canst thou terror feel ?
Cheer thee, and still that throbbing heart ;
From Ronald's guard thou shalt not part.”—
—O ! many a shaft, at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant !
And many a word, at random spoken,
May soothe or wound a heart that's broken !
Half soothed, half grieved, half terrified,
Close drew the page to Ronald's side ;
A wild delirious thrill of joy
Was in that hour of agony,
As up the steepy pass he strove,
Fear, toil, and sorrow, lost in love !

XIX.

The barrier of that iron shore,
The rock's steep ledge is now climb'd o'er ;
And from the castle's distant wall,
From tower to tower the warders call ;

The sound swings over land and sea,
And marks a watchful enemy.
They gain'd the Chase, a wide domain
Left for the Castle's silvan reign,
(Seek not the scene—the axe, the plough,
The boor's dull fence, have marr'd it now,)
But then, soft swept in velvet green
The plain with many a glade between,
Whose tangled alleys far invade
The depth of the brown forest shade.
Here the tall fern obscured the lawn,
Fair shelter for the sportive fawn ;
There, tufted close with copsewood green,
Was many a swelling hillock seen ;
And all around was verdure meet
For pressure of the fairies' feet.
The glossy holly loved the park,
The yew-tree lent its shadow dark,
And many an old oak, worn and bare,
With all its shiver'd boughs, was there.
Lovely between, the moonbeams fell
On lawn and hillock, glade and dell.
The gallant Monarch sigh'd to see
These glades so loved in childhood free,
Bethinking that, as outlaw now,
He ranged beneath the forest bough.

XX.

Fast o'er the moonlight Chase they sped.
Well knew the band that measured tread,
When, in retreat or in advance,
The serried warriors move at once :
And evil were the luck, if dawn
Descried them on the open lawn.
Copses they traverse, brooks they cross,
Strain up the bank and o'er the moss.
From the exhausted page's brow
Cold drops of toil are streaming now ;
With effort faint and lengthen'd pause,
His weary step the stripling draws.
" Nay, droop not yet !" the warrior said ;
" Come, let me give thee ease and aid !
Strong are mine arms, and little care
A weight so slight as thine to bear.—
What ! wilt thou not ?—capricious boy !—
Then thine own limbs and strength employ.
Pass but this night, and pass thy care,
I'll place thee with a lady fair,
Where thou shalt tune thy lute to tell
How Ronald loves fair Isabel !"
Worn out, dishearten'd, and dismay'd,
Here Amadine let go the plaid ;
His trembling limbs their aid refuse,
He sunk among the midnight dews !

XXI.

What may be done ?—the night is gone—
The Bruce's band moves swiftly on—
Eternal shame, if at the brunt
Lord Ronald grace not battle's front !—
“ See yonder oak, within whose trunk
Decay a darken'd cell hath sunk ;
Enter and rest thee there a space,
Wrap in my plaid thy limbs, thy face.
I will not be, believe me, far ;
But must not quit the ranks of war.
Well will I mark the bosky bourne,
And soon, to guard thee hence, return.—
Nay, weep not so, thou simple boy !
But sleep in peace, and wake in joy.”
In sylvan lodging close bestow'd,
He placed the page, and onward strode
With strength put forth, o'er moss and brook,
And soon the marching band o'ertook.

XXII.

Thus strangely left, long sobb'd and wept
The page, till, wearied out, he slept—
A rough voice waked his dream—“ Nay, here,
Here by this thicket, pass'd the deer—
Beneath that oak old Ryno staid—
What have we here ?—a Scottish plaid,
And in its folds a stripling laid ?—

Come forth ! thy name and business tell !
What, silent ?—then I guess thee well,
The spy that sought old Cuthbert's cell,
Wafted from Arran yester morn—
Come, comrades, we will straight return.
Our Lord may choose the rack should teach
To this young lurcher use of speech.
Thy bow-spring, till I bind him fast.”
“Nay, but he weeps and stands aghast ;
Unbound we'll lead him, fear it not ;
'Tis a fair stripling, though a Scot.”
The hunters to the castle sped,
And there the hapless captive led.

XXIII.

Stout Clifford in the castle-court
Prepared him for the morning sport ;
And now with Lorn held deep discourse,
Now gave command for hound and horse.
War-steeds and palfreys paw'd the ground,
And many a deer-dog howl'd around.
To Amadine, Lorn's well-known word
Replying to that Southron Lord,
Mix'd with this clanging din, might seem
The phantasm of a fever'd dream.
The tone upon his ringing ears
Came like the sounds which fancy hears;

When in rude waves or roaring winds
Some words of woe the muser finds,
Until more loudly and more near,
Their speech arrests the page's ear.

XXIV.

"And was she thus," said Clifford, "lost?
The priest shall rue it to his cost!
What says the monk?"—"The holy Sire
Owns, that in masquer's quaint attire
She sought his skiff, disguised, unknown
To all except to him alone.
But, says the priest, a bark from Lorn
Laid them aboard that very morn,
And pirates seized her for their prey.
He proffer'd ransom-gold to pay,
And they agreed—but ere told o'er,
The winds blow loud, the billows roar;
They sever'd, and they met no more.
He deems—such tempest vex'd the coast—
Ship, crew, and fugitive, were lost.
So let it be, with the disgrace
And scandal of her lofty race!
Thrice better she had ne'er been born,
Than brought her infamy on Lorn!"

XXV.

Lord Clifford now the captive spied;—
"Whom, Herbert, hast thou there?" he cried.

"A spy we seized within the Chase,
A hollow oak his lurking place."—
"What tidings can the youth afford?"—
"He plays the mute."—"Then noose a cord—
Unless brave Lorn reverse the doom
For his plaid's sake."—"Clan-Colla's loom,"
Said Lorn, whose careless glances trace
Rather the vesture than the face,
"Clan-Colla's dames such tartans twine ;
Wearer nor plaid claims care of mine.
Give him, if my advice you crave,
His own scathed oak ; and let him wave
In air, unless, by terror wrung,
A frank confession find his tongue.—
Nor shall he die without his rite ;
—Thou, Angus Roy, attend the sight,
And give Clan-Colla's dirge thy breath,
As they convey him to his death."—
"O brother ! cruel to the last !"
Through the poor captive's bosom pass'd
The thought, but, to his purpose true,
He said not, though he sigh'd "Adieu !"

XXVI.

And will he keep his purpose still,
In sight of that last closing ill,
When one poor breath, one single word,
May freedom, safety, life, afford ?

Can he resist the instinctive call,
For life that bids us barter all?—
Love, strong as death, his heart hath steel'd,
His nerves hath strung—he will not yield!
Since that poor breath, that little word,
May yield Lord Ronald to the sword.—
Clan-Colla's dirge is pealing wide,
The griesly headsman's by his side;
Along the greenwood Chase they bend,
And now their march has ghastly end!
That old and shatter'd oak beneath,
They destine for the place of death.
—What thoughts are his, while all in vain
His eye for aid explores the plain?
What thoughts, while, with a dizzy ear,
He hears the death-prayer mutter'd near?
And must he die such death accurst,
Or will that bosom-secret burst!
Cold on his brow breaks terror's dew,
His trembling lips are livid blue;
The agony of parting life
Has nought to match that moment's strife!

XXVII.

But other witnesses are nigh,
Who mock at fear, and death defy!
Soon as the dire lament was play'd,
It waked the lurking ambuscade.

The Island Lord look'd forth, and spied
The cause, and loud in fury cried,
" By Heaven they lead the page to die,
And mock me in his agony !
They shall abye it !"—On his arm
Bruce laid strong grasp, " They shall not harm
A ringlet of the stripling's hair ;
But, till I give the word, forbear.
—Douglas, lead fifty of our force
Up yonder hollow water-course,
And couch thee midway on the wold,
Between the flyers and their hold :
A spear above the copse display'd,
Be signal of the ambush made.
—Edward, with forty spearmen, straight
Through yonder copse approach the gate,
And, when thou hear'st the battle-din,
Rush forward, and the passage win,
Secure the drawbridge—storm the port,
And man and guard the castle-court.—
The rest move slowly forth with me,
In shelter of the forest-tree,
Till Douglas at his post I see."

XXVIII.

Like war-horse eager to rush on,
Compell'd to wait the signal blown,

Hid, and scarce hid, by greenwood bough,
Trembling with rage, stands Ronald now,
And in his grasp his sword gleams blue,
Soon to be dyed with deadlier hue.—
Meanwhile The Bruce, with steady eye
Sees the dark death-train moving by,
And, heedful, measures oft the space
The Douglas and his band must trace,
Ere they can reach their destined ground.
Now sinks the dirge's wailing sound,
Now cluster round the direful tree
That slow and solemn company,
While hymn mistuned and mutter'd prayer
The victim for his fate prepare.—
What glances o'er the greenwood shade?
The spear that marks the ambuscade!—
“Now, noble Chief! I leave thee loose;
Upon them, Ronald!” said The Bruce.

XXIX.

“The Bruce, The Bruce!” to well-known cry
His native rocks and woods reply.
“The Bruce, The Bruce!” in that dread word
The knell of hundred deaths was heard.
The astonish'd Southrons gazed at first,
Where the wild tempest was to burst,
That waked in that presaging name.
Before, behind, around it came!

Half-arm'd, surprised, on every side
Hemm'd in, hew'd down, they bled and died.
Deep in the ring The Bruce engaged,
And fierce Clan-Colla's broadsword raged !
Full soon the few who fought were sped,
Nor better was their lot who fled,
And met, 'mid terror's wild career,
The Douglas's redoubted spear !
Two hundred yeomen on that morn
The castle left, and none return.

XXX.

Not on their flight press'd Ronald's brand,
A gentler duty claim'd his hand.
He raised the page, where on the plain
His fear had sunk him with the slain :
And twice, that morn, surprise well near
Betray'd the secret kept by fear :
Once, when, with life returning, came
To the boy's lip Lord Ronald's name,
And hardly recollection drown'd
The accents in a murmuring sound ;
And once, when scarce he could resist
The Chieftain's care to loose the vest,
Drawn tightly o'er his labouring breast.
But then The Bruce's bugle blew,
For martial work was yet to do.

XXXI.

A harder task fierce Edward waits.
Ere signal given, the castle gates
His fury had assail'd ;
Such was his wonted reckless mood,
Yet desperate valour oft made good,
Even by its daring, venture rude,
Where prudence might have fail'd.
Upon the bridge his strength he threw,
And struck the iron chain in two,
By which its planks arose ;
The warder next his axe's edge
Struck down upon the threshold ledge,
'Twixt door and post a ghastly wedge !
The gate they may not close.
Well fought the Southron in the fray,
Clifford and Lorn fought well that day,
But stubborn Edward forced his way
Against a hundred foes.
Loud came the cry, "The Bruce, The Bruce!"
No hope or in defence or truce,
Fresh combatants pour in ;
Mad with success, and drunk with gore,
They drive the struggling foe before,
And ward on ward they win.
Unsparing was the vengeful sword,
And limbs were lopp'd and life-blood pour'd,

The cry of death and conflict roar'd,
And fearful was the din !
The startling horses plunged and flung,
Clamour'd the dogs till turrets rung,
Nor sunk the fearful cry,
Till not a foeman was there found
Alive, save those who on the ground
Groan'd in their agony !

XXXII.

The valiant Clifford is no more ;
On Ronald's broadsword stream'd his gore.
But better hap had he of Lorn,
Who, by the foeman backward borne,
Yet gain'd with slender train the port,
Where lay his bark beneath the fort,
And cut the cable loose.
Short were his shrift in that debate,
That hour of fury and of fate,
If Lorn encounter'd Bruce !
Then long and loud the victor shout
From turret and from tower rung out,
The rugged vaults replied ;
And from the donjon tower on high,
The men of Carrick may descry,
Saint Andrew's cross, in blazonry
Of silver, waving wide !

XXXIII.

The Bruce hath won his father's hall!—
“ Welcome, brave friends and comrades all,
 Welcome to mirth and joy!
The first, the last, is welcome here,
From lord and chieftain, prince and peer,
 To this poor speechless boy.
Great God! once more my sire's abode
Is mine—behold the floor I trode
 In tottering infancy!
And there the vaulted arch, whose sound
Echoed my joyous shout and bound
In boyhood, and that rung around
 To youth's unthinking glee!
O first, to thee, all-gracious Heaven,
Then to my friends, my thanks be given!”—
He paused a space, his brow he cross'd—
Then on the board his sword he toss'd,
Yet steaming hot; with Southron gore
From hilt to point 'twas crimson'd o'er.

XXXIV.

“ Bring here,” he said, “ the mazers four,
My noble fathers loved of yore.
Thrice let them circle round the board,
The pledge, fair Scotland's rights restored!
And he whose lip shall touch the wine,
Without a vow as true as mine,

To hold both lands and life at nought,
Until her freedom shall be bought,—
Be brand of a disloyal Scot,
And lasting infamy his lot !
Sit, gentle friends ! our hour of glee
Is brief, we'll spend it joyously !
Blithest of all the sun's bright beams,
When betwixt storm and storm he gleams.
Well is our country's work begun,
But more, far more must yet be done.
Speed messengers the country through ;
Arouse old friends, and gather new ;
Warn Lanark's knights to gird their mail,
Rouse the brave sons of Teviotdale,
Let Ettrick's archers sharp their darts,
The fairest forms, the truest hearts !
Call all, call all ! from Reeds-wair-Path,
To the wild confines of Cape-Wrath ;
Wide let the news through Scotland ring
The Northern Eagle claps his wing !"





I.



WHO, that shared them, ever shall forget
The emotions of the spirit-rousing time,
When breathless in the mart the couriers met,
Early and late, at evening and at prime,
When the loud cannon and the merry chime
Hail'd news on news, as field on field was won,
When Hope, long doubtful, soar'd at length sublime,
And our glad eyes, awake as day begun,
Watch'd Joy's broad banner rise, to meet the rising sun !

O these were hours, when thrilling joy repaid
A long, long course of darkness, doubts, and fears !





The heart-sick faintness of the hope delay'd,
The waste, the woe, the bloodshed, and the tears
That track'd with terror twenty rolling years,
All was forgot in that blithe jubilee !
Her downcast eye even pale Affliction rears,
To sigh a thankful prayer, amid the glee,
That hail'd the Despot's fall, and peace and liberty !

Such news o'er Scotland's hills triumphant rode,
When 'gainst the invaders turn'd the battle's scale,
When Bruce's banner had victorious flow'd
O'er Loudoun's mountain, and in Ury's vale ;
When English blood oft deluged Douglas-dale,
And fiery Edward routed stout St. John,
When Randolph's war-cry swelled the southern gale,
And many a fortress, town, and tower was won,
And Fame still sounded forth fresh deeds of glory done.

II.

Blithe tidings flew from baron's tower,
To peasant's cot, to forest bower,
And waked the solitary cell,
Where lone Saint Bride's recluses dwell.
Princess no more, fair Isabel,
A vot'ress of the order now,
Say, did the rule that bid thee wear
Dim veil and woollen scapulaire,

And reft thy locks of dark-brown hair,
That stern and rigid vow,
Did it condemn the transport high,
Which glisten'd in thy watery eye,
When minstrel or when palmer told
Each fresh exploit of Bruce the Bold?—
And whose the lovely form, that shares
Thy anxious hopes, thy fears, thy prayers?
No sister she of convent shade;
So says these locks in lengthen'd braid,
So say the blushes and the sighs,
The tremors that unbidden rise,
When, mingled with The Bruce's fame,
The brave Lord Ronald's praises came.

III.

Believe, his father's castle won,
And his bold enterprise begun,
That Bruce's earliest cares restore
The speechless page to Arran's shore.
Nor think that long the faint disguise
Conceal'd her from a sister's eyes;
And sister-like in love they dwell
In that lone convent's silent cell.
There Bruce's slow assent allows
Fair Isabel the veil and vows;
And there her sex's dress regain'd,
The lovely Maid of Lorn remain'd,

Unnamed, unknown, while Scotland far
Resounded with the din of war ;
And many a month, and many a day,
In calm seclusion wore away.

IV.

These days, these months, to years had worn,
When tidings of high weight were borne
 To that lone island's shore ;
Of all the Scottish conquests made,
By the first Edward's ruthless blade,
 His son retain'd no more,
Northward of Tweed, but Stirling's towers,
Beleaguer'd by King Robert's powers ;
 And they took terms of truce,
If England's King should not relieve
The siege ere John the Baptist's eve,
 To yield them to The Bruce.
England was roused—on every side
Courier and post and herald hied,
 To summon prince and peer,
At Berwick-bounds to meet their Liege,
Prepared to raise fair Stirling's siege,
 With buckler, brand, and spear.
The term was nigh—they muster'd fast,
By beacon and by bugle-blast
 Forth marshall'd for the field ;
There rode each knight of noble name,

There England's hardy archers came,
The land they trode seem'd all on flame,
 With banner, blade, and shield !
And not famed England's powers alone,
Renown'd in arms, the summons own ;
 For Neustria's knights obey'd,
Gasconne hath lent her horsemen good,
And Cambria, but of late subdued,
Sent forth her mountain-multitude,
And Connoght pour'd from waste and wood
Her hundred tribes, whose sceptre rude
 Dark Eth O'Connor sway'd.

V.

Right to devoted Caledon
The storm of war rolls slowly on,
 With menace deep and dread ;
So the dark clouds, with gathering power,
Suspend awhile the threaten'd shower,
Till every peak and summit lower
 Round the pale pilgrim's head.
Not with such pilgrim's startled eye
King Robert mark'd the tempest nigh !
 Resolved the brunt to bide,
His royal summons warn'd the land,
That all who own'd their King's command
Should instant take the spear and brand,
 To combat at his side.

O who may tell the sons of fame,
That at King Robert's bidding came,
 To battle for the right !
From Cheviot to the shores of Ross,
From Solway-Sands to Marshal's-Moss,
 All boun'd them for the fight.
Such news the royal courier tells,
Who came to rouse dark Arran's dells ;
But farther tidings must the ear
Of Isabel in secret hear.
These in her cloister walk, next morn,
Thus shared she with the Maid of Lorn.

VI.

“ My Edith, can I tell how dear
Our intercourse of hearts sincere
 Hath been to Isabel ?—
Judge then the sorrow of my heart,
When I must say the words, We part !
 The cheerless convent-cell
Was not, sweet maiden, made for thee ;
Go thou where thy vocation free
 On happier fortunes fell.
Nor, Edith, judge thyself betray'd,
Though Robert knows that Lorn's high Maid
And his poor silent page were one.
Versed in the fickle heart of man,

Earnest and anxious hath he look'd
How Ronald's heart the message brook'd
That gave him, with her last farewell,
The charge of Sister Isabel,
To think upon thy better right,
And keep the faith his promise plight.
Forgive him for thy sister's sake,
At first if vain repinings wake—

Long since that mood is gone ;
Now dwells he on thy juster claims,
And oft his breach of faith he blames—
Forgive him for thine own !”

VII.

“ No ! never to Lord Ronald's bower
Will I again as paramour ”——
“ Nay, hush thee, too impatient maid,
Until my final tale be said !—
The good King Robert would engage
Edith once more his elfin page,
By her own heart, and her own eye,
Her lover's penitence to try—
Safe in his royal charge, and free,
Should such thy final purpose be,
Again unknown to seek the cell,
And live and die with Isabel.”
Thus spoke the Maid—King Robert's eye
Might have some glance of policy ;

Dunstaffnage had the Monarch ta'en,
And Lorn had own'd King Robert's reign;
Her brother had to England fled,
And there in banishment was dead;
Ample, through exile, death, and flight,
O'er tower and land was Edith's right;
This ample right o'er tower and land
Were safe in Ronald's faithful hand.

VIII.

Embarrass'd eye and blushing cheek
Pleasure and shame, and fear bespeak!
Yet much the reasoning Edith made:
"Her sister's faith she must upbraid,
Who gave such secret, dark and dear,
In council to another's ear.
Why should she leave the peaceful cell?—
How should she part with Isabel—
How wear that strange attire agen?—
How risk herself 'midst martial men?—
And how be guarded on the way?—
At least she might entreat delay."
Kind Isabel, with secret smile,
Saw and forgave the maiden's wile,
Reluctant to be thought to move
At the first call of truant love.

IX.

Oh, blame her not !—when zephyrs wake,
The aspen's trembling leaves must shake ;
When beams the sun through April's shower,
It needs must bloom, the violet flower ;
And Love, howe'er the maiden strive,
Must with reviving hope revive !
A thousand soft excuses came,
To plead his cause 'gainst virgin shame.
Pledged by their sires in earliest youth,
He had her plighted faith and truth—
Then, 'twas her Liege's strict command,
And she, beneath his royal hand,
A ward in person and in land :—
And, last, she was resolved to stay
Only brief space—one little day—
Close hidden in her safe disguise
From all, but most from Ronald's eyes—
But once to see him more !—nor blame
Her wish—to hear him name her name !—
Then, to bear back to solitude
The thought, he had his falsehood rued !
But Isabel, who long had seen
Her pallid cheek and pensive mien,
And well herself the cause might know
Though innocent, of Edith's woe,
Joy'd, generous, that revolving time
Gave means to expiate the crime.

High glow'd her bosom as she said,
" Well shall her sufferings be repaid !"
Now came the parting hour—a band
From Arran's mountains left the land ;
Their Chief, Fitz-Louis, had the care
The speechless Amadine to bear
To Bruce, with honour, as behoved
To page the Monarch dearly loved.

X.

The King had deem'd the maiden bright
Should reach him long before the fight,
But storms and fate her course delay :
It was on eve of battle-day,
When o'er the Gillie's-hill she rode.
The landscape like a furnace glow'd,
And far as e'er the eye was borne,
The lances waved like autumn-corn.
In battles four beneath their eye,
The forces of King Robert lie.
And one below the hill was laid,
Reserved for rescue and for aid ;
And three, advanced, form'd vaward-line,
'Twixt Bannock's brook and Ninian's shrine.
Detach'd was each, yet each so nigh
As well might mutual aid supply.
Beyond, the Southern host appears,
A boundless wilderness of spears,

Whose verge or rear the anxious eye
Strove far, but strove in vain, to spy.
Thick flashing in the evening beam,
Glaives, lances, bills, and banners gleam ;
And where the heaven join'd with the hill,
Was distant armour flashing still,
So wide, so far, the boundless host
Seem'd in the blue horizon lost.

XI.

Down from the hill the maiden pass'd,
At the wild show of war aghast !
And traversed first the rearward host,
Reserved for aid where needed most.
The men of Carrick and of Ayr,
Lennox and Lanark too, were there,
And all the western land ;
With these the valiant of the Isles
Beneath their chieftains ranked their files,
In many a plaided land,
There, in the centre, proudly raised,
The Bruce's royal standard blazed,
And there Lord Ronald's banner bore
A galley driven by sail and oar.
A wild, yet pleasing contrast, made
Warriors in mail and plate array'd,
With the plumed bonnet and the plaid
By these Hebrideans worn ;

But O! unseen for three long years,
Dear was the garb of mountaineers
 To the fair Maid of Lorn!
For one she look'd—but he was far
Busied amid the ranks of war—
Yet with affection's troubled eye
She mark'd his banner boldly fly,
Gave on the countless foe a glance,
And thought on battle's desperate chance.

XII.

To centre of the vaward line
Fitz-Louis guided Amadine.
Arm'd all on foot, that host appears
A seried mass of glimmering spears.
There stood the Marchers' warlike band,
The warriors there of Lodon's land;
Ettrick and Liddell bent the yew,
A band of archers fierce, though few;
The men of Nith and Annan's vale,
And the bold Spears of Teviotdale;—
The dauntless Douglas these obey,
And the young Stuart's gentle sway,
North-eastward by Saint Ninian's shrine,
Beneath fierce Randolph's charge, combine
The warriors whom the hardy North
From Tay to Sutherland send forth.

The rest of Scotland's war-array
With Edward Bruce to westward lay,
Where Bannock, with his broken bank
And deep ravine, protects their flank.
Behind them, screen'd by sheltering wood,
The gallant Keith, Lord Marshall, stood.
His men-at-arms bear mace and lance,
And plumes that wave, and helms that glance.
Thus fair divided by the King,
Centre, and right, and left-ward wing,
Composed his front ; nor distant far
Was strong reserve to aid the war.
And 'twas to front of this array,
Her guide and Edith made their way.

XIII.

Here must they pause ; for in advance
As far as one might pitch a lance,
The Monarch rode along the van,
The foe's approaching force to scan,
His line to marshal and to range,
And ranks to square, and fronts to change.
Alone he rode—from head to heel
Sheathed in his ready arms of steel ;
Nor mounted yet on war-horse wight,
But, till more near the shock of fight,
Reining a palfrey low and light.



CANTO SIXTH.

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A diadem of gold was set
Above his bright steel basinet,
And clasp'd within its glittering twine
Was seen the glove of Argentine ;
Truncheon or leading staff he lacks,
Bearing, instead, a battle-axe.
He ranged his soldiers for the fight,
Accoutred thus, in open sight
Of either host.—Three bowshows far,
Paused the deep front of England's war,
And rested on their arms awhile,
To close and rank their warlike file,
And hold high council, if that night
Should view the strife, or dawning light.

XIV.

O gay, yet fearful to behold,
Flashing with steel and rough with gold,
And bristled o'er with bills and spears,
With plumes and pennons waving fair,
Was that bright battle-front ! for there
Rode England's King and peers :
And who, that saw that monarch ride,
His kingdom battled by his side,
Could then his direful doom foretell !—
Fair was his seat in knightly selle,
And in his sprightly eye was set
Some spark of the Plantagenet.

Though light and wandering was his glance,
It flash'd at sight of shield and lance.
"Know'st thou," he said, "De Argentine,
Yon knight who marshals thus their line?"—
"The tokens on his helmet tell
The Bruce, my Liege: I know him well."—
"And shall the audacious traitor brave
The presence where our banners wave?"—
"So please my Liege," said Argentine,
"Were he but horsed on steed like mine,
To give him fair and knightly chance,
I would adventure forth my lance."—
"In battle-day," the King replied,
Nice tourney rules are set aside.
—Still must the rebel dare our wrath?
Set on him—sweep him from our path!"—
And, at King Edward's signal, soon
Dash'd from the ranks Sir Henry Boune.

XV.

Of Hereford's high blood he came,
A race renown'd for knightly fame.
He burn'd before his Monarch's eye
To do some deed of chivalry.
He spurr'd his steed, he couched his lance,
And darted on The Bruce at once.
—As motionless as rocks, that bide
The wrath of the advancing tide,

The Bruce stood fast.—Each breast beat high,
And dazzled was each gazing eye—
The heart had hardly time to think,
The eyelid scarce had time to wink,
While on the King, like flash of flame,
Spurr'd to full speed the war-horse came !
The partridge may the falcon mock,
If that slight palfrey stand the shock—
But, swerving from the Knight's career,
Just as they met, Bruce shunn'd the spear.
Onward the baffled warrior bore
His course—but soon his course was o'er !—
High in his stirrups stood the King,
And gave his battle-axe the swing.
Right on De Boune, the whiles he pass'd,
Fell that stern dint—the first—the last !—
Such strength upon the blow was put,
The helmet crash'd like hazel-nut ;
The axe-shaft, with its brazen clasp,
Was shiver'd to the gauntlet grasp.
Springs from the blow the startled horse,
Drops to the plain the lifeless corse ;
—First of that fatal field, how soon,
How sudden, fell the fierce De Boune !

XVI.

One pitying glance the Monarch sped,
Where on the field his foe lay dead ;

Then gently turn'd his palfrey's head,
And, pacing back his sober way,
Slowly he gain'd his own array.
There round their King the leaders crowd,
And blame his recklessness aloud,
That risk'd 'gainst each adventurous spear
A life so valued and so dear.
His broken weapon's shaft survey'd
The King, and careless answer made,—
“My loss may pay my folly's tax;
I've broke my trusty battle-axe.”
'Twas then Fitz-Louis, bending low,
Did Isabel's commission show;
Edith, disguised, at distance stands,
And hides her blushes with her hands.
The Monarch's brow has changed its hue,
Away the gory axe he threw,
While to the seeming page he drew,
Clearing war's terrors from his eye.
Her hand with gentle ease he took,
With such a kind protecting look,
As to a weak and timid boy
Might speak, that elder brother's care
And elder brother's love were there.

XVII.

“Fear not,” he said, “young Amadine!”
Then whisper'd, “Still that name be thine.”

Fate plays her wonted fantasy,
Kind Amadine, with thee and me,
And sends thee here in doubtful hour.
But soon we are beyond her power ;
For on this chosen battle-plain,
Victor or vanquish'd, I remain.
Do thou to yonder hill repair ;
The followers of our host are there,
And all who may not weapons bear.—
Fitz-Louis, have him in thy care.—
Joyful we meet, if all go well ;
If not, in Arran's holy cell
Thou must take part with Isabel ;
For brave Lord Ronald, too, hath sworn
Not to regain the Maid of Lorn,
(The bliss on earth he covets most,)
Would he forsake his battle-post,
Or shun the fortune that may fall
To Bruce, to Scotland, and to all.—
But, hark ! some news these trumpets tell ;
Forgive my haste—farewell !—farewell !”—
And in a lower voice he said,
“ Be of good cheer—farewell, sweet maid !”—

XVIII.

“ What train of dust, with trumpet-sound,
And glimmering spears, is wheeling round

Our leftward flank ?"—the Monarch cried,
To Moray's Earl who rode beside.
"Lo ! round thy station pass the foes !
Randolph, thy wreath has lost a rose."
The Earl his visor closed, and said,
"My wreath shall bloom, or life shall fade.—
Follow, my household !"—And they go
Like lightning on the advancing foe.
"My Liege," said noble Douglas then,
"Earl Randolph has but one to ten :
Let me go forth his band to aid !"—
—"Stir not. The error he hath made,
Let him amend it as he may ;
I will not weaken mine array."
Then loudly rose the conflict-cry,
And Douglas's brave heart swell'd high,—
"My Liege," he said, "with patient ear
I must not Moray's death-knell hear !"—
"Then go—but speed thee back again !"—
Forth sprung the Douglas with his train :
But, when they won a rising hill,
He bade his followers hold them still.—
"See, see ! the routed Southrons fly !
The Earl hath won the victory.
Lo ! where yon steeds run masterless,
His banner towers above the press.
Rein up ; our presence would impair
The fame we come too late to share."

Back to the host the Douglas rode,
And soon glad tidings are abroad,
That, Dayncourt by stout Randolph slain,
His followers fled with loosen'd rein.—
That skirmish closed the busy day,
And couch'd in battle's prompt array.
Each army on their weapons lay.

XIX.

It was a night of lovely June,
High rode in cloudless blue the moon,
Demayet smiled beneath her ray;
Old Stirling's towers arose in light,
And, twined in links of silver bright,
Her winding river lay.
Ah, gentle planet! other sight
Shall greet thee, next returning night,
Of broken arms and banners tore,
And marshes dark with human gore,
And piles of slaughtered men and horse,
And Forth that floats the frequent corse,
And many a wounded wretch to plain
Beneath thy silver light in vain!
But now, from England's host, the cry
Thou hear'st of wassail revelry,
While from the Scottish legions pass
The murmur'd prayer, the early mass!

Here, numbers had presumption given ;
There, bands o'ermatch'd sought aid from Heaven.

XX.

On Gillie's-hill whose height commands
The battle-field, fair Edith stands,
With serf and page unfit for war
To eye the conflict from afar.
O! with what doubtful agony
She sees the dawning tint the sky !
Now on the Ochils gleams the sun,
And glistens now Demayet dun ;
Is it the lark that carols shrill ?
Is it the bittern's early hum ?
No !—distant, but increasing still,
The trumpet's sound swells up the hill,
With the deep murmur of the drum.
Responsive from the Scottish host,
Pipe-clang and bugle-sound were toss'd,
His breast and brow each soldier cross'd,
And started from the ground ;
Arm'd and array'd for instant fight,
Rose archer, spearman, squire and knight,
And in the pomp of battle bright
The dread battalia frown'd.



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VIEW FROM STIRLING CASTLE, LOOKING TOWARDS BANNOCKBURN.



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XXI.

Now onward, and in open view,
The countless ranks of England drew,
Dark rolling like the ocean-tide,
When the rough west hath chafed his pride,
And his deep roar sends challenge wide

To all that bars his way !

In front the gallant archers trode,
The men-at-arms behind them rode,
And midmost of the phalanx broad

The Monarch held his sway.

Beside him many a war-horse fumes,
Around him waves a sea of plumes,
Where many a knight in battle known,
And some who spurs had first braced on,
And deem'd that fight should see them won,

King Edward's hests obey.

De Argentine attends his side,
With stout De Valence, Pembroke's pride,
Selected champions from the train
To wait upon his bridle-rein.

Upon the Scottish foe he gazed—
—At once, before his sight amazed,

Sunk banner, spear, and shield ;
Each weapon-point is downward sent,
Each warrior to the ground is bent.

“The rebels, Argentine, repent ;
For pardon they have kneel'd.”—

"Aye!—but they bend to other powers,
And other pardon sue than ours!
See where yon bare-foot Abbot stands,
And blesses them with lifted hands!
Upon the spot where they have kneel'd,
These men will die or win the field."—
—"Then prove we if they die or win!
Bid Gloster's Earl the fight begin."

XXII.

Earl Gilbert waved his truncheon high,
Just as the Northern ranks arose,
Signal for England's archery
To halt and bend their bows.
Then stepp'd each yeoman forth a pace,
Glanced at the intervening space,
And raised his left hand high;
To the right ear the cords they bring—
—At once ten thousand bow-strings ring,
Ten thousand arrows fly!
Nor paused on the devoted Scot
The ceaseless fury of their shot;
As fiercely and as fast,
Forth whistling came the grey-goose wing
As the wild hailstones pelt and ring
Adown December's blast.
Nor mountain targe of tuff bull-hide,

Nor lowland mail, that storm may bide ;
Woe, woe to Scotland's banner'd pride,
If the fell shower may last !

Upon the right, behind the wood,
Each by his steed dismounted, stood
The Scottish chivalry ;—

With foot in stirrup, hand on mane,
Fierce Edward Bruce can scarce restrain
His own keen heart, his eager train,
Until the archers gain'd the plain ;

Then, " Mount, ye gallants free !"
He cried ; and, vaulting from the ground,
His saddle every horseman found.
On high their glittering crests they toss,
As springs the wild-fire from the moss ;
The shield hangs down on every breast,
Each ready lance is in the rest.

And loud shouts Edward Bruce,—
" Forth, Marshal ! on the peasant foe !
We'll tame the terrors of their bow,
And cut the bow-string loose !"

XXIII.

Then spurs were dash'd in chargers' flanks,
They rush'd among the archer ranks.
No spears were there the shock to let,
No stakes to turn the charge were set,

And how shall yeoman's armour slight
Stand the long lance and mace of might ?
Or what may their short swords avail,
'Gainst barbed horse and shirt of mail ?
Amid their ranks the chargers sprung,
High o'er their heads the weapons swung,
And shriek and groan and vengeful shout
Give note of triumph and of rout !
Awhile, with stubborn hardihood,
Their English hearts the strife made good.
Borne down at length on every side,
—Compell'd to flight, they scatter wide.—
Let stags of Sherwood leap for glee,
And bound the deer of Dallom-Lee !
The broken bows of Bannock's shore
Shall in the greenwood ring no more !
Round Wakefield's merry May-pole now,
The maids may twine the summer bough,
May northward look with longing glance,
For those that wont to lead the dance,
For the blithe archers look in vain !
Broken, dispersed, in flight o'erta'en,
Pierced through, trode down, by thousands slain,
They cumber Bannock's bloody plain.

XXIV.

The King with scorn beheld their flight.
“Are these,” he said, “our yeomen wight ?

Each braggart churl could boast before,
Twelve Scottish lives his baldric bore !
Fitter to plunder chase or park,
Than make a manly foe their mark.—
Forward, each gentleman and knight !
Let gentle blood show generous might
And chivalry redeem the fight !”
To rightward of the wild affray,
The field show'd fair and level way ;
 But, in mid-space, The Bruce's care
Had bored the ground with many a pit,
With turf and brushwood hidden yet,
 That form'd a ghastly snare.
Rushing, ten thousand horsemen came,
With spears in rest, and hearts on flame,
 That panted for the shock !
With blazing crests and banners spread,
And trumpet-clang, and clamour dread,
The wide plain thunder'd to their tread,
 As far as Stirling rock.
Down ! down ! in headlong overthrow,
Horseman and horse, the foremost go,
 Wild floundering on the field !
The first are in destruction's gorge,
Their followers wildly o'er them urge ;—
 The knightly helm and shield,
The mail, the acton, and the spear,
Strong hand, high heart, are useless here !

Loud from the mass confused the cry
Of dying warriors swells on high,
And steeds that shriek in agony !
They came like mountain-torrent red,
That thunders o'er its rocky bed ;
They broke like that same torrent's wave
When swallow'd by a darksome cave.
Billows on billows burst and boil,
Maintaining still the stern turmoil,
And to their wild and tortured groan
Each adds new terrors of his own !

XXV.

Too strong in courage and in might
Was England yet, to yield the fight.
Her noblest all are here ;
Names that to fear were never known,
Bold Norfolk's Earl De Brotherton,
And Oxford's famed De Vere.
There Gloster plied the bloody sword,
And Berkley, Grey, and Hereford,
Bottetourt and Sanzavere,
Ross, Montague, and Mauley, came.
And Courtenay's pride, and Percy's fame—
Names known too well in Scotland's war,
At Falkirk, Methven, and Dunbar,
Blazed broader yet in after years,
At Cressy red and fell Poitiers.

Pembroke with these, and Argentine,
Brought up the rear-ward battle-line.
With caution o'er the ground they tread,
Slippery with blood and piled with dead,
Till hand to hand in battle set,
The bills with spears and axes met,
And, closing dark on every side,
Raged the full contest far and wide.
Then was the strength of Douglas tried,
Then proved was Randolph's generous pride,
And well did Stewart's actions grace
The sire of Scotland's royal race !

Firmly they kept their ground ;
As firmly England onward press'd,
And down went many a noble crest,
And rent was many a valiant breast,
And Slaughter revell'd round.

XXVI.

Unflinching foot 'gainst foot was set,
Unceasing blow by blow was met ;
The groans of those who fell
Were drown'd amid the shriller clang,
That from the blades and harness rang,
And in the battle-yell.
Yet fast they fell, unheard, forgot,
Both Southron fierce and hardy Scot ;

And O! amid that waste of life,
What various motives fired the strife!
The aspiring Noble bled for fame,
The Patriot for his country's claim;
This knight his youthful strength to prove,
And that to win his lady's love;
Some fought from ruffian thirst of blood,
From habit some, or hardihood.
But ruffian stern, and soldier good,
The noble and the slave,
From various cause the same wild road,
On the same bloody morning, trode,
To that dark inn, the Grave!

XXVII.

The tug of strife to flag begins,
Though neither loses yet nor wins.
High rides the sun, thick rolls the dust,
And feebler speeds the blow and thrust.
Douglas leans on his war-sword now,
And Randolph wipes his bloody brow;
Nor less had toil'd each Southron knight,
From morn till mid-day in the fight.
Strong Egremont for air must gasp,
Beauchamp undoes his visor-clasp,
And Montague must quit his spear,
And sinks thy falchion, bold De Vere!

The blows of Berkley fall last fast,
And gallant Pembroke's bugle-blast
Hath lost its lively tone ;
Sinks, Argentine, thy battle-word,
And Percy's shout was fainter heard,
" My merry men, fight on ! "

XXVIII.

Bruce, with the pilot's wary eye,
The slackening of the storm could spy.
" One effort more, and Scotland's free !
Lord of the Isles, my trust in thee
Is firm as Ailsa Rock ;
Rush on with Highland sword and targe,
I, with my Carrick spearmen, charge ;
Now, forward to the shock ! "
At once the spears were forward thrown,
Against the sun the broadswords shone ;
The pibroch lent its maddening tone,
And loud King Robert's voice was known—
" Carrick, press on—they fail, they fail !
Press on, brave sons of Innisgail,
The foe is fainting fast !
Each strike for parent, child, and wife,
For Scotland, liberty, and life,—
The battle cannot last ! "

XXIX.

The fresh and desperate onset bore
The foes three furlongs back and more,
Leaving their noblest in their gore.

Alone, De Argentine

Yet bears on high his red-cross shield,
Gathers the relics of the field,
Renews the ranks where they have reel'd,
And still makes good the line.

Brief strife, but fierce, his efforts raise,
A bright but momentary blaze.
Fair Edith heard the Southron shout,
Beheld them turning from the rout,
Heard the wild call their trumpets sent,
In notes 'twixt triumph and lament.
That rallying force, combined anew,
Appear'd in her distracted view,
To hem the Islesmen round !

“ O God ! the combat they renew,

And is no rescue found !

And ye that look thus tamely on,
And see your native land o'erthrown,
O ! are your hearts of flesh or stone ? ”

XXX.

The multitude that watch'd afar,
Rejected from the ranks of war,

Had not unmoved beheld the fight,
When strove The Bruce for Scotland's right ;
Each heart had caught the patriot spark,
Old man and stripling, priest and clerk,
Bondsman and serf ; even female hand
Stretch'd to the hatchet or the brand ;
But, when mute Amadine they heard
Give to their zeal his signal-word,
A frenzy fired the throng ;
" Portents and miracles impeach
Our sloth —the dumb our duties teach—
And He that gives the mute his speech,
Can bid the weak be strong.
To us, as to our lords, are given
A native earth, a promised heaven ;
To us, as to our lords, belongs
The vengeance for our nation's wrongs ;
The choice, 'twixt death or freedom, warms
Our breasts as theirs.—To arms, to arms !"
To arms they flew,—axe, club, or spear,—
And mimic ensigns high they rear,
And, like a banner'd host afar,
Bear down on England's wearied war.

XXXI.

Already scatter'd o'er the plain,
Reproof, command, and counsel vain,
The rearward squadrons fled amain,

Or made but doubtful stay ;—
But when they marked the seeming show
Of fresh and fierce and marshall'd foe,
The boldest broke array.
O give their hapless prince his due !
In vain the royal Edward threw
His person 'mid the spears,
Cried " Fight ! " to terror and despair,
Menaced, and wept, and tore his hair,
And cursed their caitiff fears ;
Till Pembroke turned his bridle rein,
And forced him from the fatal plain.
With them rode Argentine, until
They gain'd the summit of the hill,
But quitted there the train :—
" In yonder field a gage I left—
I must not live of fame bereft :
I needs must turn again.
Speed hence, my Liege, for on your trace
The fiery Douglas takes the chase,
I know his banner well.
God send my Sovereign joy and bliss,
And many a happier field than this !—
Once more, my Liege, farewell."

XXXII.

Again he faced the battle-field,—
Wildly they fly, are slain, or yield,

“ Now then,” he said, and couch’d his spear,
“ My course is run, the goal is near ;
One effort more, one brave career,
 Must close this race of mine.”
Then in his stirrups rising high,
He shouted loud his battle-cry,
 “ Saint James for Argentine ! ”
And, of the bold pursuers, four
The gallant knight from saddle bore ;
But not unharm’d—a lance’s point
Has found his breastplate’s loosen’d joint.
 An axe has razed his crest ;
Yet still on Colonsay’s fierce lord,
Who press’d the chase with gory sword,
 He rode with spear in rest,
And through his bloody tartans bored,
 And through his gallant breast.
Nail’d to the earth, the mountaineer
Yet writhed him up against the spear,
 And swung his broadsword round !—
Stirrup, steel-boot, and cuish gave way,
Beneath that blow’s tremendous sway,
 The blood gush’d from the wound ;
And the grim Lord of Colonsay
 Hath turn’d him on the ground,
And laugh’d in death-pang, that his blade
The mortal thrust so well repaid.

XXXIII.

Now toil'd The Bruce, the battle done,
To use his conquest boldly won ;
And gave command for horse and spear
To press the Southron's scatter'd rear,
Nor let his broken force combine,—
When the war-cry of Argentine
Fell faintly on his ear !
“ Save, save his life,” he cried, “ O save
The kind, the noble, and the brave ! ”
The squadrons round free passage gave,
The wounded knight drew near !
He raised his red-cross shield no more,
Helm, cuish, and breastplate stream'd with gore,
Yet, as he saw the King advance,
He strove even then to couch his lance—
The effort was in vain !
The spur-stroke fail'd to rouse the horse ;
Wounded and weary, in mid course
He stumbled on the plain.
Then foremost was the generous Bruce
To raise his head, his helm to loose ;—
“ Lord Earl, the day is thine !
My Sovereign's charge, and adverse fate,
Have made our meeting all too late ;
Yet this may Argentine,
As boon from ancient comrade, crave—
A Christian's mass, a soldier's grave.”

XXXIV.

Bruce press'd his dying hand—its grasp
Kindly replied ; but, in his clasp,
 It stiffen'd and grew cold—
“And, O farewell !” the victor cried,
“Of chivalry the flower and pride,
 The arm in battle bold,
The courteous mien, the noble race,
The stainless faith, the manly face !—
Bid Ninian's convent light their shrine,
For late—wake of De Argentine.
O'er better knight on death-bier laid,
Torch never gleam'd, nor mass was said !”

XXXV.

Nor for De Argentine alone,
Through Ninian's Church these torches shone,
And rose the death-prayer's awful tone.
That yellow lustre glimmer'd pale,
On broken plate and bloodied mail,
Rent crest and shatter'd coronet,
Of Baron, Earl, and Banneret ;
And the best names that England knew,
Claim'd in the death-prayer dismal due.
 Yet mourn not, Land of Fame !
Though ne'er the leopards on thy shield
Retreated from so sad a field,
 Since Norman William came.

Oft may thine annals justly boast
Of battles stern by Scotland lost ;
 Grudge not her victory,
When for her freeborn rights she strove ;
Rights dear to all who freedom love,
 To none so dear as thee !

XXXVI.

Turn we to Bruce, whose curious ear
Must from Fitz-Louis tidings hear ;
With him a hundred voices tell
Of prodigy and miracle,
 “ For the mute page had spoke.”—
“ Page !” said Fitz-Louis, “ rather say,
An angel sent from realms of day,
 To burst the English yoke.
I saw his plume and bonnet drop,
When hurrying from the mountain top ;
A lovely brow, dark locks that wave,
To his bright eyes new lustre gave,
A step as light upon the green,
As if his pinions waved unseen !”
“ Spoke he with none ?”—“ With none—one word
Burst when he saw the Island Lord,
Returning from the battle-field.”—
“ What answer made the Chief ?”—“ He kneel’d
Durst not look up, but mutter’d low,
Some mingled sounds that none might know,

And greeted him 'twixt joy and fear,
As being of superior sphere."

XXXVII.

Even upon Bannock's bloody plain,
Heap'd then with thousands of the slain,
'Mid victor monarch's musings high,
Mirth laugh'd in good King Robert's eye.
"And bore he such angelic air,
Such noble front, such waving hair?
Hath Ronald kneel'd to him?" he said,
"Then must we call the Church to aid—
Our will be to the Abbot known,
Ere these strange news are wider blown,
To Cambuskenneth straight ye pass,
And deck the church for solemn mass,
To pay for high deliverance given,
A nation's thanks to gracious Heaven.
Let him array, besides, such state,
As should on princes' nuptials wait,
Ourself the cause, through fortune's spite,
That once broke short that spousal rite,
Ourself will grace, with early morn,
The bridal of the Maid of Lorn."

CONCLUSION.

Go forth, my song, upon thy venturous way ;
Go boldly forth ; nor yet thy master blame,
Who chose no patron for his humble lay,
And graced thy numbers with no friendly name,
Whose partial zeal might smooth thy path to fame.
There was—and O ! how many sorrows crowd
Into these two brief words !—*there was* a claim
By generous friendship given—had fate allow'd,
It well had bid thee rank the proudest of the proud !

All angel now—yet little less than all,
While still a pilgrim in our world below !
What 'vails it us that patience to recall,
Which hid its own to soothe all other woe ;
What 'vails to tell, how Virtue's purest glow,
Shone yet more lovely in a form so fair :
And, least of all, what 'vails the world should know,
That one poor garland, twined to deck thy hair,
Is hung upon thy hearse, to droop and wither there !



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